Characters

(In Order of Appearance)

- JULIA AUGUSTINE
- TEETA
- MATTIE
- LULA GREEN
- FANNY JOHNSON
- NELSON GREEN
- THE BELL MAN
- PRINCESS
- HERMAN
- ANNABELLE
- HERMAN'S MOTHER

Act 1

Act 1, Scene 1

ACT ONE

SCENE 1

TIME: *Summer 1918...Saturday morning. A city by the sea...South Carolina, U˙S˙A˙*

SCENE: *Three houses in a backyard. The center house is newly painted and cheery looking in contrast to the other two which are weather-beaten and shabby. Center house is gingerbready...odds and ends of "picked up" shutters, picket railing, wrought iron railing, newel posts, a Grecian pillar, odd window boxes of flowers ...everything clashes with a beautiful, subdued splendor; the old and new mingles in defiance of style and period. The playing areas of the houses are raised platforms furnished according to the taste of each tenant. Only one room of each house is visible*. JULIA AUGUSTINE *(tenant of the center house) has recently moved in and there is still unpacking to be done. Paths are worn from the houses to the front yard entry. The landlady's house and an outhouse are offstage. An outdoor hydrant supplies water*.

JULIA *is sleeping on the bed in the center house*. TEETA, *a girl about eight years old, enters the yard from the Stage Right house. She tries to control her weeping as she examines a clump of grass. The muffled weeping disturbs* JULIA' *s sleep. She starts up, half rises from her pillow, then falls back into a troubled sleep*. MATTIE, TEETA' *s mother, enters carrying a switch and fastening her clothing. She joins the little girl in the search for a lost quarter. The search is subdued, intense*.

MATTIE

You better get out there and get it! Did you find it? Gawd, what've I done to be treated this way! You gon' get a

whippin' too.

FANNY JOHNSON

(*Enters from the front entry. She is landlady and the self-appointed, fifty-year-old representative of her race*.)

Listen, Mattie ... I want some quiet out here this mornin'.

MATTIE

Dammit, this gal done lost the only quarter I got to my name.

(LULA *enters from the direction of the outhouse carrying a covered slop jar. She is forty-five and motherly*.)

"Teeta," I say, "Go to the store, buy three cent grits, five cent salt pork, ten cent sugar; and keep your hand closed 'roun' my money." How I'm gonna sell any candy if I got no sugar to make it? You little heifer!

(*Goes after* TEETA *who hides behind* LULA.)

LULA GREEN

Gawd, help us to find it.

MATTIE

Your daddy is off sailin' the ocean and you got nothin' to do but lose money! *I'm gon' put you out in the damn street, that's what!*

(TEETA *cries out*. JULIA *sits up in the bed and cries out*.)

JULIA AUGUSTINE

No...no...

FANNY JOHNSON

You disturbin' the only tenant who's paid in advance.

LULA GREEN

TEETA, retrace your steps. Show Lula what you did.

TEETA

I hop-hop-hop ...

(*Hops near a post-railing of* JULIA' *s porch*.)

MATTIE

What the hell you do that for?

LULA GREEN

There 'tis! That's a quarter ... down in the hole ... Can't reach it ...

(JULIA *is now fully awake. Putting on her house-dress over her camisole and petticoat*. MATTIE *takes an axe from the side of the house to knock the post out of the way*.)

Aw, *move*, move! That's all the money I got. I'll tear this damn house down and you with it!

FANNY JOHNSON

And I'll blow this police whistle.

(JULIA *steps out on the porch. She is an attractive brown woman about thirty-five years old*.)

MATTIE

Blow it ... blow it ... blow it ... hot damn--

(*Near tears. She decides to tell* JULIA *off also*.)

I'll tear it down--that's right. If you don't like it--come on down here and whip me.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

(*Nervous but determined to present a firm stand*.)

Oh, my ... Good mornin' ladies. My name is Julia Augustine. I'm not gonna move.

LULA GREEN

My name is Lula. Why you think we wantcha to move?

FANNY JOHNSON

Miss Julia, I'm sorry your first day starts like this. Some people are ice cream and others just cow-dung. I try to be ice cream.

MATTIE

Dammit, I'm ice cream, too. Strawberry.

(*Breaks down and cries*.)

FANNY JOHNSON

That's Mattie. She lost her last quarter, gon' break down my house to get it.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

(*Gets a quarter from her dresser*.)

Oh my, dear heart, don't cry. Take this twenty-five cents, Miss Mattie.

MATTIE

No thank you, ma'm.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

And I have yours under my house for good luck.

FANNY JOHNSON

Show your manners.

TEETA

Thank you. You the kin'est person in the worl'.

(LULA *enters her house*. TEETA *starts for home, then turns to see if her mother is coming*.)

MATTIE

(*TO* JULIA.)

I didn't mean no harm. But my husband October's in the Merchant Marine and I needs my little money. Well, thank you.

(*TO* TEETA.)

Come on, honey bunch.

(*She enters her house Stage Right*. TEETA *proudly follows*. LULA *is putting* NELSON' *s breakfast on the table at Stage Left*.)

FANNY JOHNSON

(*Testing strength of post*.)

My poor father's turnin' in his grave. He built these rent houses just 'fore he died ... And he wasn't a carpenter. Shows what the race can do when we wanta.

(*Feels the porch railing and tests its strength*.)

That loud-mouth Mattie used to work in a white cat-house.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

A what?

FANNY JOHNSON

Sportin' house, house of ... A whore house. Know what she used to do?

JULIA AUGUSTINE

(*Embarrassed*.)

Not but so many things to do, I guess.

(FANNY *wants to follow her in the house but* JULIA *fends her off*.)

FANNY JOHNSON

Used to wash their joy-towels. Washin' joy-towels for one cent apiece. I wouldn't work in that kinda place--would you?

JULIA AUGUSTINE

Indeed not.

FANNY JOHNSON

Vulgarity.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

(*Trying to get away*.)

I have my sewing to do now, Miss Fanny.

FANNY JOHNSON

I got a lovely piece-a blue serge. Six yards.

(*She attempts to get into the house but* JULIA *deftly blocks the door*.)

JULIA AUGUSTINE

I don't sew for people.

(FANNY *wonders why not*.)

I do homework for a store ... hand-finishin' on ladies' shirtwaists.

FANNY JOHNSON

You 'bout my age ... I'm thirty-five.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

(*After a pause*.)

I thought you were younger.

FANNY JOHNSON

(*Genuinely moved by the compliment*.)

Thank you. But I'm not married 'cause nobody's come up to my high standard. Where you get them expensive-lookin', high-class shoes?

JULIA AUGUSTINE

In a store. I'm busy now, Miss Fanny.

FANNY JOHNSON

Doin' what?

JULIA AUGUSTINE

First one thing then another. Good-day.

(*Thinks she has dismissed her. Goes in the house*. FANNY *quickly follows into the room ... picks up a teacup from the table*.)

FANNY JOHNSON

There's a devil in your tea-cup ... also prosperity. Tell me 'bout yourself, don't be so distant.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

It's all there in the tea-leaves.

FANNY JOHNSON

Oh, go on! I'll tell you somethin' ... that sweet-face Lula killed her only child.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

No, she didn't.

FANNY JOHNSON

In a way-a speakin'. And then Gawd snatched up her triflin' husband. One nothin' piece-a man. Biggest thing he ever done for her was to lay down and die. Poor woman. Yes indeed, then she went and adopted this fella from the colored orphan home. Boy grew too big for a lone woman to keep in the house. He's a big, strappin', over-grown man now. I wouldn't feel safe livin' with a man that's not blood kin, 'doption or no 'doption. It's 'gainst nature. Oughta see the muscles on him.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

(*Wearily*.)

Oh, my ... I think I hear somebody callin' you.

FANNY JOHNSON

Yesterday the white-folks threw a pail-a dirty water on him. A black man on leave got no right to wear his uniform in public. The crackers don't like it. That's flauntin' yourself.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

Miss Fanny, I don't talk about people.

FANNY JOHNSON

Me neither.

(*Giving her serious advice*.)

We high-class, quality people oughta stick together.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

I really do stay busy.

FANNY JOHNSON

Doin' what? Seein' your beau? You have a beau haven't-cha?

JULIA AUGUSTINE

(*Realizing she must tell her something in order to get rid of her*.)

Miss Johnson ...

FANNY JOHNSON

Fanny.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

(*Managing to block her toward the door*.)

My mother and father have long gone on to Glory.

FANNY JOHNSON

Gawd rest the dead and bless the orphan.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

Yes, I do have a beau ... But I'm not much of a mixer.

(*She now has* FANNY *out on the porch*.)

FANNY JOHNSON

Get time, come up front and see my parlor. I got a horsehair settee and a four piece, silver-plated tea service.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

Think of that.

FANNY JOHNSON

The first and only one to be owned by a colored woman in the United States of America. Salesman told me.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

Oh, just imagine.

(MATTIE *enters wearing a blue calico dress and striped apron*.)

FANNY JOHNSON

My mother was a genuine, full-blooded, qualified, Seminole Indian.

TEETA

(*Calls to her mother from the doorway*.)

Please ... Mama ... Mama ... Buy me a hair ribbon.

MATTIE

All right! I'm gon' buy my daughter a hair ribbon.

FANNY JOHNSON

Her hair is so short you'll have to nail it on.

(FANNY *exits to her house*.)

MATTIE

That's all right about that, Fanny. Your father worked in a stinkin' phosphate mill ... yeah, and didn't have a tooth in his head. Then he went and married some half Portuguese woman. I don't call that bein' in no damn society. I works for my livin'. I makes candy and I takes care of a little white girl. Hold this nickel 'til I get back. Case of emergency I don't like Teeta to be broke.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

I'll be busy today, lady.

MATTIE

(*As she exits carrying a tray of candy*.)

Thank you, darlin'.

TEETA

Hey lady, my daddy helps cook food on a big war boat. He peels potatoes. You got any children?

JULIA AUGUSTINE

No ... Grace-a Gawd.

(*Starts to go in house*.)

TEETA

Hey, lady! Didja ever hear of Philadelphia? After the war that's where we're goin' to live. Philadelphia!

JULIA AUGUSTINE

Sounds like heaven.

TEETA

Jesus is the President of Philadelphia.

(TEETA *sweeps in front of* JULIA' *s house. Lights come up in* LULA' *s house*, NELSON *is eating breakfast. He is a rather rough-looking muscly fellow with a soft voice and a bittersweet sense of humor. He is dressed*

in: civilian finery and his striped silk shirt seems out of place in the drab little room. LULA *makes paper flowers, and the colorful bits of paper are seen everywhere as finished and partially finished flowers and stems, also a finished funeral piece. A picture of Abraham Lincoln hangs on the upstage wall*. LULA *is brushing* NELSON' *s uniform jacket*.)

LULA GREEN

Last week the Bell Man came to collect the credit payment he says ... "Auntie, watcha doin' with Abraham Lincoln's pitcher on the wall? He was such a poor president."

NELSON GREEN

Tell the cracker to mind his damn business.

LULA GREEN

It don't pay to get mad. Remember yesterday.

NELSON GREEN

(*Studying her face for answers*.)

Mama, you supposed to get mad when somebody throw a pail-a water on you.

LULA GREEN

It's their country and their uniform, so just stay out the way.

NELSON GREEN

Right, I'm not goin' back to work in that coalyard when I get out the army.

LULA GREEN

They want you back. A bird in the hand, y'know.

NELSON GREEN

A bird in the hand ain't always worth two in the bush.

LULA GREEN

This is Saturday, tomorrow Sunday ... thank Gawd for Monday; back to the army. That's one thing ... Army keeps you off the street.

(*The sound of the* SHRIMP MAN *passing in the street*.)

SHRIMP MAN

(*Offstage*.)

Shrimp-dee-raw ... I got raw shrimp.

(NELSON *leaves the house just as* JULIA *steps out on her porch to hang a rug over the rail*. TEETA *enters* GREEN *house*.)

NELSON GREEN

Er ... howdy-do, er ... beg pardon. My name is Nelson. Lula Green's son, if you don't mind. Miss ... er ... Mrs˙?

JULIA AUGUSTINE

(*After a brief hesitation*.)

Miss ... Julia Augustine.

NELSON GREEN

Miss Julia, you the best-lookin' woman I ever seen in my life. I declare you look jus' like a violin sounds. And I'm not talkin' 'bout pretty. You look like you got all the right feelin's, you know?

JULIA AUGUSTINE

Well, thank you, Mr˙ Nelson.

NELSON GREEN

See, you got me talkin' all outta my head.

(LULA *enters*, TEETA *follows eating a biscuit and carrying a milk pail ... she exits toward street*.)

Let's go for a walk this evenin', get us a lemon phosphate.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

Oh, I don't care for any, Mr˙ Nelson.

LULA GREEN

That's right. She say stay home.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

(*TO* NELSON.)

I'm sorry.

NELSON GREEN

Don't send me back to the army feelin' bad 'cause you turn me down. Orange-ade tonight on your porch. I'll buy the oranges, you be the sugar.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

No, thank you.

NELSON GREEN

Let's make it--say--six o'clock.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

No, I said no!

LULA GREEN

Nelson, go see your friends.

(*He waves goodbye to* JULIA *and exits through the back entry*.)

He's got a lady friend, her name is Merrilee Jones. And he was just tryin' to be neighborly. That's how me and Nelson do. But you go on and stay to yourself.

(*Starts toward her house*.)

JULIA AUGUSTINE

Miss Lula! I'm sorry I hurt your feelin's. Miss Lula! I have a gentleman friend, that's why I said no.

LULA GREEN

I didn't think-a that. When yall plan to cut the cake?

JULIA AUGUSTINE

Not right now. You see ... when you offend Gawd you hate for it to be known. Gawd might forgive but people never will. I mean ... when a man and a woman are not truly married ...

LULA GREEN

Oh, I see.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

I live by myself ... but he visits ... I declare I don't know how to say ...

LULA GREEN

Everybody's got some sin, but if it troubles your heart you're a gentle sinner, just a good soul gone wrong.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

That's a kind thought.

LULA GREEN

My husband, Gawd rest the dead, used to run 'round with other women; it made me kind-a careless with my life. One day, many long years ago, I was sittin' in a neighbor's house tellin' my troubles; my only child, my little boy, wandered out on the railroad track and got killed.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

That must-a left a fifty pound weight on your soul.

LULA GREEN

It did. But if we grow stronger ... and rise higher than what's pullin' us down ...

JULIA AUGUSTINE

Just like Climbin' Jacob's Ladder ...

(*Sings*.)

Every round goes higher and higher ...

LULA GREEN

Yes, rise higher than the dirt ... that fifty pound weight will lift and you'll be free, free without anybody's by-your-leave. Do something to wash out the sin. That's why I got Nelson from the orphanage.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

And now you feel free?

LULA GREEN

No, not yet. But I believe Gawd wants me to start a new faith; one that'll make our days clear and easy to live. That's what I'm workin' on now. Oh, Miss Julia, I'm glad you my neighbor.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

Oh, thank you, Miss Lula! Sinners or saints, didn't Gawd give us a beautiful day this mornin'!

(*The sound of cow-bells clanking and the thin piping of a tin and paper flute*, TEETA *backs into the yard carefully carrying the can of milk*, THE BELL MAN *follows humming, "Over There" on the flute. He is a poor white about thirty years old but time has dealt him some hard blows. He carries a large suitcase; the American flag painted on both sides, cowbells are attached*. THE BELL MAN *rests his case on the ground. Fans with a very tired-looking handkerchief. He cuts the fool by dancing and singing a bit of a popular song as he turns corners around the yard*.)

BELL MAN

(*As* LULA *starts to go in the house*.)

Stay where you at, Aunty! You used to live on Thompson Street. How's old Thompson Street?

JULIA AUGUSTINE

(*A slightly painful memory*.)

I moved 'bout a year ago, moved to Queen Street.

BELL MAN

Move a lot, don'tcha?

(*Opens suitcase*.)

All right, everybody stay where you at!

(*Goes into a fast sales spiel*.)

Lace-trim ladies' drawers! Stockin's, ladies' stockin's ... gottem for the knock-knees and the bow-legs too ... white, black and navy blue! All right, no fools no fun! The joke's on me! Here we go!

(*As he places some merchandise in front of the* WOMEN; *does a regular minstrel walk-around*.)

Anything in the world ... fifty cent a week and one long, sweet year to pay ... Come on, little sister!

TEETA

(*Doing the walk-around with* THE BELL MAN.)

And a-ring-ting-tang
And-a shimmy-she-bang
While the sun am a-shinin' and the sky am blue ...
And a-ring-ting-tang
And-a shimmy-she-bang
While the sun am a-shinin' and the sky am blue ...

LULA GREEN

(*Annoyed with* TEETA' *s dancing with* THE BELL MAN.)

Stop all that shimmy she-bang and get in the house!

(*Swats at* TEETA *as she passes*.)

BELL MAN

(*Coldly*.)

Whatcha owe me, Aunty?

LULA GREEN

Three dollars and ten cent. I don't have any money today.

BELL MAN

When you gon' pay?

LULA GREEN

Monday, or better say Wednesday.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

(*To divert his attention from* LULA.)

How much for sheets?

BELL MAN

For you they on'y a dollar.

(JULIA *goes to her house to get the money*. THE BELL MAN *moves toward her house as he talks to* LULA.)

Goin' to the Service Men's parade Monday?

LULA GREEN

Yes, sir. My boy's marchin'.

(*She exits*.)

BELL MAN

Uh-huh, I'll getcha later. Lord, Lord, Lord, how'dja like to trot 'round in the sun beggin' the poorest people in the world to buy somethin' from you. This is nice. Real nice.

(*TO* JULIA.)

A good friend-a mine was a nigra boy. Me 'n' him was jus' like that. Fine fella, he couldn't read and he couldn't write.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

(*More to herself than to him*.)

When he learns you're gon' lose a friend.

BELL MAN

But talkin' serious, what is race and color? Put a paper bag over your head and who'd know the difference. Tryin' to remember me ain'tcha. I seen you one time coming out that bakery shop on Thompson Street, didn' see me.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

Is that so?

BELL MAN

(*Sits on the bed and bounces up and down*.)

Awwww, Great Gawd-a-mighty! I haven't been on a high-built bed since I left the back woods.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

Please don't sit on my bed!

BELL MAN

Old country boy, that's me! Strong and healthy country boy ...

(*Not noticing any rejection*.)

Sister, Um in need for it like I never been before. Will you 'comodate me? Straighten me, fix me up, will you? Wouldn't take but five minutes. Um quick like a jack rabbit. Wouldn't nobody know but you and me.

(*She backs away from him as he pants and wheezes out his admiration*.)

Um clean, too. Clean as the ... Board-a Health. Don't believe in dippin' inta everything. I got no money now, but Ladies always need stockin's.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

(*Trying to keep her voice down, throws money at his feet*.)

Get out of my house! Beneath contempt, that's what you are.

BELL MAN

Don't be lookin' down your nose at me ... actin' like you Mrs˙ Martha Washington ... Throwin' one chicken-shit dollar at me and goin' on ...

JULIA AUGUSTINE

(*Picking up wooden clothes hanger*.)

Get out! Out, before I take a stick to you.

BELL MAN

(*Bewildered, gathering his things to leave*.)

Hell, what I care who you sleep with! It's your nooky! Give it way how you want to. I don't own no run-down bakery shop but I'm good as those who do. A baker ain' nobody ...

JULIA AUGUSTINE

I wish you was dead, you just oughta be dead, stepped on and dead.

BELL MAN

Bet that's what my mama said first time she saw me. I was a fourteenth child. Damn women! ... that's all right ... Gawd bless you, Gawd be with you and let his light shine on you. I give you good for evil ... God bless you!

(*As he walks down the porch steps*.)

She must be goin' crazy. Unfriendly, sick-minded bitch!

(TEETA *enters from* LULA' *s house*. THE BELL MAN *takes a strainer from his pocket and gives it to* TEETA *with a great show of generosity*.)

Here, little honey. You take this sample. You got nice manners.

TEETA

Thank you, you the kin'est person in the world.

(THE BELL MAN *exits to the tune of clanking bells, and* LULA *enters*.)

JULIA AUGUSTINE

I hate those kind-a people.

LULA GREEN

You mustn't hate white folks. Don'tcha believe in Jesus? He's white.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

I wonder if he believes in me.

LULA GREEN

Gawd says we must love everybody.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

Just lovin' and lovin', no matter what? There are days when I love, days when I hate.

FANNY JOHNSON

Mattie, Mattie, mail!

JULIA AUGUSTINE

Your love is worthless if nobody wants it.

(FANNY *enters carrying a letter. She rushes over to Mattie's house*.)

FANNY JOHNSON

I had to pay the postman two cent. No stamp.

TEETA

(*Calls to* JULIA.)

Letter from Papa! Gimmie my mama's five cents!

FANNY JOHNSON

(*TO* TEETA.)

You gon' end your days in the Colored Women's Jailhouse.

(PRINCESS, *a little girl, enters skipping and jumping. She hops, runs and leaps across the yard*. PRINCESS *is six years old*. TEETA *takes money from* JULIA' *s outstretched hand and gives it to* FANNY.)

TEETA

(*TO* MATTIE.)

Letter from Papa! Gotta pay two cent!

FANNY JOHNSON

Now I owe you three cent ... or do you want me to read the letter?

(PRINCESS *gets wilder and wilder, makes Indian war whoops*. TEETA *joins the noise-making. They climb porches and play follow-the-leader*. PRINCESS *finally lands on* JULIA' *s porch after peeping and prying into everything along the way*.)

PRINCESS

(*Laughing merrily*.)

Hello ... hello ... hello.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

(*Overwhelmed by the confusion*.)

Well--Hello.

FANNY JOHNSON

Get away from my new tenant's porch!

PRINCESS

(*Is delighted with* FANNY' *S scolding and decides to mock her*.)

My new tennis porch!

(MATTIE *opens the letter and removes a ten-dollar bill. Lost in thought she clutches the letter to her bosom*.)

FANNY JOHNSON

(*To* MATTIE.)

Ought-a mind w-h-i-t-e children on w-h-i-t-e property!

PRINCESS

(*Now swinging on* JULIA' *S gate*.)

... my new tennis porch!

FANNY JOHNSON

(*Chases* PRINCESS *around the yard*.)

You Princess! Stop that!

(JULIA *laughs but she is very near tears*.)

MATTIE

A letter from October.

FANNY JOHNSON

Who's gon' read it for you?

MATTIE

Lula!

PRINCESS

My new tennis porch!

FANNY JOHNSON

Princess! Mattie!

MATTIE

Teeta! In the house with that drat noise!

FANNY JOHNSON

It'll take Lula half-a day.

(*Snatches letter*.)

I won't charge but ten cent.

(*Reads*.)

"Dear, Sweet Molasses, My Darlin' Wife ..."

MATTIE

No, I don't like how you make words sound. You read too rough.

(*Sudden offstage yells and screams from* TEETA *and* PRINCESS *as they struggle for possession of some toy*.)

PRINCESS

(*Offstage*)

Give it to me!

TEETA

No! It's mine!

MATTIE

(*Screams*.)

Teeta!

(*The* CHILDREN *are quiet*.)

FANNY JOHNSON

Dear, Sweet Molasses--how 'bout that?

JULIA AUGUSTINE

(*To* FANNY.)

Stop that! Don't read her mail.

FANNY JOHNSON

She can't read it.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

She doesn't want to. She's gonna go on holdin' it in her hand and never know what's in it ... just 'cause it's hers!

FANNY JOHNSON

Forgive 'em Father, they know not.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

Another thing, you told me it's quiet here! You call this quiet? I can't stand it!

FANNY JOHNSON

When you need me come and humbly knock on my back door.

(*She exits*.)

MATTIE

(*Shouts to* FANNY.)

I ain't gonna knock on no damn back door! Miss Julia, can you read?

(*Offers the letter to* JULIA.)

I'll give you some candy when I make it.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

(*Takes the letter*.)

All right.

(LULA *takes a seat to enjoy a rare social event. She winds stems for the paper flowers as* JULIA *reads*.)

Dear, sweet molasses, my darlin' wife.

MATTIE

Yes, honey.

(*To* JULIA.)

Thank you.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

(*Reads*.)

Somewhere, at sometime, on the high sea, I take my pen in hand ... well, anyway, this undelible pencil.

LULA GREEN

Hope he didn't put it in his mouth.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

(*Reads*.)

I be missin' you all the time.

MATTIE

And we miss you.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

(*Reads*.)

Sorry we did not have our picture taken.

MATTIE

Didn't have the money.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

(*Reads*.)

Would like to show one to the men and say this is my wife and child ... They always be showin' pictures.

MATTIE

(*Waves the ten-dollar bill*.)

I'm gon' send you one, darlin'.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

(*Reads*.)

I recall how we used to take a long walk on Sunday afternoon ...

(*Thinks about this for a moment*.)

... then come home and be lovin' each other.

MATTIE

I recall.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

(*Reads*.)

The Government people held up your allotment.

MATTIE

Oh, do Jesus.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

(*Reads*.)

They have many papers to be sign, pink, blue and white also green. Money can't be had 'til all papers match. Mine don't match.

LULA GREEN

Takes a-while.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

(*Reads*.)

Here is ten cash dollars I hope will not be stole.

MATTIE

(*Holds up the money*.)

I got it.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

(*Reads*.)

Go to Merchant Marine office and push things from your end.

MATTIE

Monday. Lula, le's go Monday.

LULA GREEN

I gotta see Nelson march in the parade.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

(*Reads*.)

They say people now droppin in the street, dying' from this war-time influenza. Don't get sick-buy tonic if you do. I love you.

MATTIE

Gotta buy a bottle-a tonic.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

(*Reads*.)

Sometimes people say hurtful things 'bout what I am, like color and race ...

MATTIE

Tell 'em you my brown-skin Carolina daddy, that's who the hell you are. Wish I was there.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

(*Reads*.)

I try not to hear 'cause I do want to get back to your side. Two things a man can give the woman he loves ... his name and his protection ... The first you have, the last is yet to someday come. The war is here, the road is rocky. I am *ever* your lovin' husband, October.

MATTIE

So-long, darlin'. I wish I had your education.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

I only went through eighth grade. Name and protection. I know you love him.

MATTIE

Yes'm, I do. If I was to see October in bed with another woman, I'd never doubt him 'cause I trust him more than I do my own eyesight. Bet yall don't believe me.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

I know how much a woman can love.

(*Glances at the letter again*.)

Two things a man can give ...

MATTIE

Name and protection. That's right, too. I wouldn't live with no man. Man got to marry me. Man that won't marry you thinks nothin' of you. Just usin' you.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

I've never allowed anybody to *use* me!

LULA GREEN

(*Trying to move her away Stage Right*.)

Mattie, look like rain.

MATTIE

A man can't use a woman less she let him.

LULA GREEN

(*TO* MATTIE.)

You never know when to stop.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

Well, I read your letter. Good day.

MATTIE

Did I hurtcha feelin's? Tell me, what'd I say.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

I--I've been keepin' company with someone for a long time and ... we're not married.

MATTIE

For how long?

LULA GREEN

(*Half-heartedly tries to hush* MATTIE *but she would also like to know*.)

Ohhh, Mattie.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

(*Without shame*)

Ten years today, ten full, faithful years.

MATTIE

He got a wife?

JULIA AUGUSTINE

(*Very tense and uncomfortable*.)

No.

MATTIE

Oh, a man don't wanta get married, work on him. Cut off piece-a his shirt-tail and sew it to your petticoat. It works. Get Fanny to read the tea leaves and tell you how to move. She's a old bitch but what she sees in a tea-cup is true.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

Thank you, Mattie.

LULA GREEN

Let's pray on it, Miss Julia. Gawd bring them together, in holy matrimony.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

Miss Lula, please don't ... You know it's against the law for black and white to get married, so Gawd nor the tea leaves can help us. My friend is white and that's why I try to stay to myself.

(*After a few seconds of silence*.)

LULA GREEN

Guess we shouldn't-a disturbed you.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

But I'm so glad you did. Oh, the things I can tell you 'bout bein' lonesome and shut-out. Always movin', one place to another, lookin' for some peace of mind. I moved out in the country ... Pretty but quiet as the graveyard; so lonesome. One year I was in such a *lovely* colored neighborhood but they couldn't be bothered with me, you know? I've lived near sportin' people ... they were very kindly but I'm not a sporty type person. Then I found this place hid way in the backyard so quiet, didn't see another soul ... And that's why I thought yall wanted to tear my house down this mornin' ... 'cause you might-a heard 'bout me and Herman ... and some people are ... well, they judge, they can't help judgin' you.

MATTIE

(*Eager to absolve her of wrong doing*.)

Oh, darlin', we all do things we don't want sometimes. You grit your teeth and take all he's got; if you don't some-body else will.

LULA GREEN

No, no, you got no use for 'em so don't take nothin' from 'em.

MATTIE

He's takin' somethin' from her.

LULA GREEN

Have faith, you won't starve.

MATTIE

Rob him blind. Take it all. Let him froth at the mouth. Let him die in the poorhouse--bitter, bitter to the gone!

LULA GREEN

A white man is somethin' else. Everybody knows how that low-down slave master sent for a different black woman every night ... for his pleasure. That's why none of us is the same color.

MATTIE

And right now today they're mean, honey. They can't help it; their nose is pinched together so close they can't get enough air. It makes 'em mean. And their mouth is set back in their face so hard and flat ... no roundness, no sweetness, they can't even carry a tune.

LULA GREEN

I couldn't stand one of 'em to touch me intimate no matter what he'd give me.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

Miss Lula, you don't understand. Mattie, the way you and your husband feel that's the way it is with me 'n' Herman. He loves me ... We love each other, that's all, we just love each other.

(*After a split second of silence*.)

And someday, as soon as we're able, we have to leave here and go where it's right ... Where it's legal for everybody to marry. That's what we both want ... to be man and wife--like you and October.

LULA GREEN

Well I have to cut out six dozen paper roses today.

(*Starts for her house*.)

MATTIE

And I gotta make a batch-a candy and look after Princess so I can feed me and Teeta 'til October comes back. Thanks for readin' the letter.

(*See enters her house*.)

JULIA AUGUSTINE

But Mattie, Lula--I wanted to tell you why it's been ten years--and why we haven't--

LULA GREEN

Good day, Miss Julia.

(*Enters her house*.)

JULIA AUGUSTINE

Well, that's always the way. What am I doing standin' in a backyard explainin' my life? Stay to yourself, Julia Augustine. Stay to yourself.

(*Sweeps her front porch*.)

I got to climb my way to glory Got to climb it by myself Ain't nobody here can climb it for me I got to climb it for myself.

CURTAIN

Act 1, Scene 2

SCENE 2

TIME: *That evening. Cover closed Scene I curtain with song and laughter from* MATTIE, LULA *and* KIDS.

As curtain opens, JULIA *has almost finished the unpacking. The room now looks quite cozy. Once in a while she watches the clock and looks out of the window*, TEETA *follows* PRINCESS *out of* MATTIE'S *house and ties her sash*, PRINCESS *is holding a jump-rope*.

MATTIE

(*Offstate. Sings*.)

My best man left me, it sure do grieve my mind When I'm laughin', I'm laughin' to keep from cryin' ...

PRINCESS

(*Twirling the rope to one side*.)

Ching, ching, China-man eat dead rat ...

TEETA

(*As* PRINCESS *jumps rope*.)

Knock him in the head with a baseball bat ...

PRINCESS

You wanta jump?

TEETA

Yes.

PRINCESS

Say "Yes, M'am."

TEETA

No.

PRINCESS

Why?

TEETA

You too little.

PRINCESS

(*Takes bean bag from her pocket*.)

You can't play with my bean bag.

TEETA

I 'on care, play it by yourself.

PRINCESS

(*Drops rope, tosses the bag to* TEETA.)

Catch.

(TEETA *throws it back*. HERMAN *appears at the back-entry. He is a strong, forty-year-old working man. His light brown hair is sprinkled with gray. At the present moment he is tired*. PRINCESS *notices him because she is facing the back fence. He looks for a gate or opening but can find none*.)

Hello.

TEETA

Mama! Mama!

HERMAN

Hello, children. Where's the gate?

(HERMAN *passes several packages through a hole in the fence; he thinks of climbing the fence but it is very rickety. He disappears from view*. MATTIE *dashes out of her house, notices the packages, runs into* LULA' *s house, then back into the yard*. LULA *enters in a flurry of excitement; gathers a couple of pieces from the clothesline*, MATTIE *goes to inspect the packages*.)

LULA GREEN

Don't touch 'em, Mattie. Might-be dynamite.

MATTIE

Well, I'm gon' get my head blowed off, 'cause I wanta see.

(NELSON *steps out wearing his best civilian clothes; neat fitting suit, striped silk shirt and bulldog shoes in ox-blood leather. He claps his hands to frighten* MATTIE.)

MATTIE

Oh, look at him. Where's the party?

NELSON GREEN

Everywhere! The ladies have heard Nelson's home. They waitin' for me!

LULA GREEN

Don't get in trouble. Don't answer anybody that bothers you.

NELSON GREEN

How come it is that when I carry a sack-a coal on my back you don't worry, but when I'm goin' out to enjoy myself you almost go crazy.

LULA GREEN

GO on! Deliver the piece to the funeral.

(*Hands him a funeral piece*. MATTIE *proceeds to examine the contents of a paper bag*.)

NELSON GREEN

Fact is, I was gon' stay home and have me some orange drink, but Massa beat me to it. None-a my business no-how, dammit.

(MATTIE *opens another bag*. HERMAN *enters through the front entry*, FANNY *follows at a respectable distance*.)

MATTIE

Look, rolls and biscuits!

LULA GREEN

Why'd he leave the food in the yard?

HERMAN

Because I couldn't find the gate. Good evening. Pleasant weather. Howdy do. Cool this evenin'.

(*Silence*.)

Err--I see where the Allies suffered another set-back yesterday. Well, that's the war, as they say.

(*The* WOMEN *answer with nods and vague throat clearings*. JULIA *opens her door, he enters*.)

MATTIE

That's the lady's husband. He's a light colored man.

PRINCESS

What is a light colored man?

(CHILDREN *exit with* MATTIE *and* NELSON, FANNY *exits by front entry*, LULA *to her house*.)

JULIA AUGUSTINE

Why'd you pick a conversation? I tell you 'bout that.

HERMAN

Man gotta say somethin' stumblin' round in a strange back yard.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

Why didn't you wear your good suit? You know how people like to look you over and sum you up.

HERMAN

Mama and Annabelle made me so damn mad tonight. When I got home Annabelle had this in the window.

(*Removes a cardboard sign from the bag ... printed with red, white and blue crayon* ... WE ARE AMERICAN CITIZENS ...)

JULIA AUGUSTINE

We are American Citizens. Why'd she put it in the window?

HERMAN

Somebody wrote cross the side of our house in purple paint ... "Krauts ... Germans live here"! I'd-a broke his arm if I caught him.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

It's the war. Makes people mean. But didn't she print it pretty.

HERMAN

Comes from Mama boastin' 'bout her German grandfather, now it's no longer fashionable. I snatched that coward sign outta the window ... Goddamit, I says ... Annabelle cryin', Mama hollerin' at her. Gawd save us from the ignorance, I say ... Why should I see a sign in the window when I get home? That Annabelle got flags flyin' in the front yard, the backyard ... and red, white and blue flowers in the grass ... confound nonsense ... Mama is an ignorant woman ...

JULIA AUGUSTINE

Don't say that ...

HERMAN

A poor ignorant woman who is mad because she was born a sharecropper ... outta her mind 'cause she ain't high class society. We're red-neck crackers, I told her, that's what.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

Oh, Herman ... no you didn't ...

HERMAN

I did.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

(*Standing*.)

But she raised you ... loaned you all-a-her three thousand dollars to pour into that bakery shop. You know you care about her.

HERMAN

Of course I do. But sometimes she makes me so mad ... Close the door, lock out the world ... all of 'em that ain't crazy are coward.

(*Looks at sign*.)

Poor Annabelle--Miss War-time Volunteer ...

JULIA AUGUSTINE

She's what you'd call a very Patriotic Person, wouldn't you say?

HERMAN

Well, guess it is hard for her to have a brother who only makes pies in time of war.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

A brother who makes pies and loves a nigger!

HERMAN

Sweet Kerist, there it is again!

JULIA AUGUSTINE

Your mama's own words ... according to you-I'll never forget them as long as I live. Annabelle, you've got a brother who makes pies and loves a nigger.

HERMAN

How can you remember seven or eight years ago, for Gawd's sake? Sorry I told it.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

I'm not angry, honeybunch, dear heart. I just remember.

HERMAN

When you say honeybunch, you're angry. Where do you want your Aunt Cora?

JULIA AUGUSTINE

On my dresser!

HERMAN

An awful mean woman.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

Don't get me started on your mama and Annabelle,

(*Pause*.)

HERMAN

Julia, why did you move into a backyard?

JULIA AUGUSTINE

(*Goes to him*.)

Another move, another mess. Some-times I feel like fightin' ... and there's nobody to fight but you ...

HERMAN

Open the box. Go on. Open it.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

(*Opens the box and reveals a small but ornate wedding cake with a bride and groom on top and ten pink candles*.)

Ohhh, it's the best one ever. Tassels, bells, roses ...

HERMAN

.... Daffodils and silver sprinkles ...

JULIA AUGUSTINE

You're the best baker in the world.

HERMAN

(*As he lights the candles*.)

Because you put up with me ...

JULIA AUGUSTINE

Gawd knows that.

HERMAN

.... because the palms of your hands and the soles of your feet are pink and brown ...

JULIA AUGUSTINE

Jus' listen to him. Well, go on.

HERMAN

Because you're a good woman, a kind, good woman.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

Thank you very much, Herman.

HERMAN

Because you care about me.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

Well, I do.

HERMAN

Happy ten years ... Happy tenth year.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

And the same to you.

HERMAN

(*Tries a bit of soft barbershop harmony*.)

I love you as I never loved before

(JULIA *joins him*.)

When first I met you on the village green Come to me e'er my dream of love is o'er I love you as I loved you When you were sweet--Take the end up higher-When you were su-weet six-ateen. Now blow!

(*They blow out the candles and kiss through a cloud of smoke*.)

JULIA AUGUSTINE

(*Almost forgetting something*.)

Got something for you. Because you were my only friend when Aunt Cora sent me on a sleep-in job in the white-folks kitchen. And wasn't that Miss Bessie one mean white woman?

(*Gives present to* HERMAN.)

HERMAN

Oh, Julia, just say she was mean.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

Well yes, but she was white too.

HERMAN

A new peel, thank you. A new pastry bag. Thank you.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

(*She gives him a sweater*.)

I did everything right but one arm came out shorter.

HERMAN

That's how I feel. Since three o'clock this morning, I turned out twenty ginger breads, thirty sponge cakes, lady fingers, Charlotte Russe ... loaf bread, round bread, twist bread and water rolls ... and--

JULIA AUGUSTINE

Tell me about pies. Do pies!

HERMAN

Fifty pies. Open apple, closed apple, apple-crumb, sweet potato and pecan. And I got a order for a large wedding cake. They want it in the shape of a battleship.

(HERMAN *gives* JULIA *ring box*. JULIA *takes out a wide, gold wedding band--it is strung on a chain*.)

It's a wedding band ... on a chain ... To have until such time as ... It's what you wanted, Julia. A damn fool present.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

Sorry I lost your graduation ring. If you'd-a gone to college what do you think you'd-a been?

HERMAN

A baker with a degree.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

(*Reads*.)

Herman and Julia 1908 ... and now it's ... 1918. Time runs away. A wedding band ... on a chain.

(*She fastens the chain around her neck*.)

HERMAN

A damn fool present.

(JULIA *drops the ring inside of her dress*.)

JULIA AUGUSTINE

It comforts me. It's your promise. You hungry?

HERMAN

No.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

After the war, the people across the way are goin' to Philadelphia.

HERMAN

I hear it's cold up there. People freeze to death waitin' for a trolley car.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

(*Leans back beside him, rubs his head*.)

In the middle of the night a big bird flew cryin' over this house-Then he was gone, the way time goes flyin' ...

HERMAN

Julia, why did you move in a back yard? Out in the country the air was so sweet and clean. Makes me feel shame ...

JULIA AUGUSTINE

(*Rubbing his back*.)

Crickets singin' that lonesome evenin' song. Any kind-a people better than none a-tall.

HERMAN

Mama's beggin' me to hire Greenlee again, to help in the shop, "Herman, sit back like a half-way gentleman and just take in money."

JULIA AUGUSTINE

Greenlee! When white-folks decide ...

HERMAN

People, Julia, people.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

When people decide to give other people a job, they come up with the biggest Uncle Tom they can find. The *people* I know call him a "white-folks-nigger." It's a terrible expression so don't you ever use it.

HERMAN

He seems dignified, Julia.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

Jus' 'cause you're clean and stand straight, that's not dignity. Even speakin' nice might not be dignity.

HERMAN

What's dignity? Tell me. Do it.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

Well, it ... it ... It's a feeling--It's a spirit that rises higher than the dirt around it, without any by-your-leave. It's not proud and it's not 'shamed ... Dignity "Is" ... and it's never Greenlee ... I don't know if it's us either, honey.

HERMAN

(*Standing*.)

It still bothers my mother that I'm a baker. "When you gonna rise in the world!" A baker who rises ...

(*Laughs and coughs a little*.)

Now she's worried 'bout Annabelle marryin' a sailor. After all, Annabelle is a concert pianist. She's had only one concert ... in a church ... and not many people there.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

A sailor might just persevere and become an admiral. Yes, an admiral and a concert pianist.

HERMAN

Ten years. If I'd-a known what I know now, I wouldn't-a let Mama borrow on the house or give me the bakery.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

Give what? Three broken stoves and all-a your papa's unpaid bills.

HERMAN

I *got* to pay her back. And I can't go to Philadelphia or wherever the hell you're saying to go. I can hear you thinkin', Philadelphia, Philadelphia, Phil ...

JULIA AUGUSTINE

(*Jumping up. Pours wine*.)

Oh damnation! The hell with that!

HERMAN

All right, not so much hell and damn. When we first met you were so shy.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

Sure was, wouldn't say "dog" 'cause it had a tail. In the beginnin' nothin' but lovin' and kissin' ... and thinkin' 'bout you. Now I worry 'bout gettin' old. I do. Maybe you'll meet somebody younger. People do get old, y'know.

(*Sits on bed*.)

HERMAN

There's an old couple 'cross from the bakery ... "Mabel," he yells, "Where's my keys!" ... Mabel has a big behind on her. She wears his carpet slippers. "All right, Robbie, m'boy," she says ... Robbie walks kinda one-sided. But they're havin' a pretty good time. We'll grow old together both of us havin' the same name.

(*Takes her in his arms*.)

Julia, I love you ... you know it ... I love you ...

(*After a pause*.)

Did you have my watch fixed?

JULIA AUGUSTINE

(*Sleepily*.)

Uh-huh, it's in my purse.

(*Getting up*.)

Last night when the bird flew over the house -I dreamed 'bout the devil's face in the fire ... He said "I'm comin' to drag you to hell."

HERMAN

(*Sitting up*.)

There's no other hell, honey. Celestine was sayin' the other day--

JULIA AUGUSTINE

How do you know what Celestine says?

HERMAN

Annabelle invited her to dinner.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

They still trying to throw that white widow-woman at you? Oh, Herman, I'm gettin' mean ... jumpin' at noises ... and bad dreams.

HERMAN

(*Brandishing bottle*.)

Dammit, this is the big bird that flew over the house!

JULIA AUGUSTINE

I don't go anywhere, I don't know anybody, I gotta do somethin'. Sometimes I need to have company-to say ... "Howdy-do, pleasant evenin,' do drop in." Sometimes I need other people. How you ever gonna pay back three thousand dollars? Your side hurt?

HERMAN

Schumann, came in to see me this mornin'. Says he'll buy me out, ten cents on the dollar, and give me a job bakin' for him ... it's an offer--can get seventeen hundred cash.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

Don't do it, Herman. That sure wouldn't be dignity.

HERMAN

He makes an American flag outta gingerbread. But they sell. Bad taste sells. Julia, where do you want to go? New York, Philadelphia, where? Let's try their dignity. Say where you want to go.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

We'll, darlin', if folks are freezin' in Philadelphia, we'll go to New York.

HERMAN

Right! You go and size up the place. Meanwhile I'll stay here and do like everybody else, make war money ... battleship cakes, cannon-ball cookies ... chocolate bullets ... they'll sell. Pay my debts. Less than a year, I'll be up there with money in my pockets.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

Northerners talk funny--"We're from New Yo *rrr*k."

HERMAN

I'll getcha train ticket next week.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

No train. I wanta stand on the deck of a Clyde Line boat, wavin' to the people on the shore. The whistle blowin', flags flyin' ...wavin' my handkerchief ... So long, so long, look here--South Carolina ... so long, hometown ... goin' away by myself --

(*Tearfully blows her nose*.)

HERMAN

You gonna like it. Stay with your cousin and don't talk to strangers.

(JULIA *gets dress from her hope chest*.)

JULIA AUGUSTINE

Then, when we do get married we can have a quiet reception. My cut glass punch bowl ... little sandwiches, a few friends ... Herman? Hope my weddin' dress isn't too small. It's been waitin' a good while.

(*Holds dress in front of her*.)

I'll use all of my hope chest things. Quilts, Irish linens, the silver cups ... Oh, Honey, how are you gonna manage with me gone?

HERMAN

Buy warm underwear and a woolen coat with a fur collar ... to turn against the northern wind. What size socks do I wear?

JULIA AUGUSTINE

Eleven, eleven and a half if they run small.

HERMAN

.... what's the store? Write it down.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

Coleridge. And go to King Street for your shirts.

HERMAN

Coleridge. Write it down.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

Keep payin' Ruckheiser, the tailor, so he can start your new suit.

HERMAN

Ruckheiser. Write it down.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

Now that I know I'm goin' we can take our time.

HERMAN

No, rush, hurry, make haste, do it. Look at you ... like your old self.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

No, no, not yet--I'll go soon as we get around to it.

(*Kisses him*.)

HERMAN

That's right. Take your time ...

JULIA AUGUSTINE

Oh, Herman.

(MATTIE *enters through the back gate with* TEETA. *She pats and arranges* TEETA' *S hair*. FANNY *enters from the front entry and goes to* JULIA'S *window*.)

MATTIE

You goin' to Lula's service?

FANNY JOHNSON

A new faith. Rather be a Catholic than somethin' you gotta make up. Girl, my new tenant and her--

MATTIE

(*Giving* FANNY *the high-sign to watch what she says in front of* TEETA.)

... and her husband.

FANNY JOHNSON

I gotcha. She and her husband was in there havin' a orgy. Singin', laughin', screamin', crying' ... I'd like to be a fly on that wall.

(LULA *enters the yard wearing a shawl over her head and a red band on her arm. She carries two chairs and places them beside two kegs*.)

LULA GREEN

Service time!

(MATTIE, TEETA *and* FANNY *enter the yard and sit down*. LULA *places a small table and a cross*.)

FANNY JOHNSON

(*Goes to* JULIA' *S door and knocks*.)

Let's spread the word to those who need it.

(*Shouts*.)

Miss Julia, don't stop if you in the middle-a somethin'. We who love Gawd are gatherin' for prayer. Got any time for Jesus?

ALL

(*Sing*.)

When the roll is called up yonder.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

Thank you, Miss Fanny.

(FANNY *flounces back to her seat in triumph*. JULIA *sits on the bed near* HERMAN.)

HERMAN

Dammit, she's makin' fun of you.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

(*Smooths her dress and hair*.)

Nobody's invited me anywhere in a long time ... so I'm goin'.

HERMAN

(*Standing*.)

I'm gonna buy you a Clyde Line ticket for New York City on Monday ... this Monday.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

Monday?

HERMAN

As Gawd is my judge. That's dignity. Monday.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

(*Joyfully kissing him*.)

Yes, Herman!

(*She enters yard*.)

LULA GREEN

My form-a service opens with praise. Let us speak to Gawd.

MATTIE

Well, I thang Gawd that--that I'm livin' and I pray my husband comes home safe.

TEETA

I love Jesus and Jesus loves me.

ALL

Amen.

FANNY JOHNSON

I thang Gawd that I'm able to rise spite-a-those who try to hold me down, spite-a those who are two-faceted, spite-a those in my own race who jealous 'cause I'm doin' so much better than the rest of 'em. He preparest a table for me in the presence of my enemies. Double-deal Fanny Johnson all you want but me 'n' Gawd's gonna come out on top.

(ALL *look to* JULIA.)

JULIA AUGUSTINE

I'm sorry for past sin--but from Monday on through eternity--I'm gonna live in dignity accordin' to the laws of God and man. Oh, Glory!

LULA GREEN

Glory Halleluhjah!

(NELSON *enters a bit unsteadily ... struts and preens while singing*.)

NELSON GREEN

Come here black woman ... whoooo ... eee ... on daddy's knee ... etc˙

LULA GREEN

(*Trying to interrupt him*.)

We're testifyin ...

NELSON GREEN

(*Throwing hat on porch*.)

Right! Testify! Tonight I asked the prettiest girl in Carolina to be my wife; and Merrilee Jones told me ... I'm sorry but you got nothin to offer. She's right! I got nothin to offer but a hard way to go. Merrilee Jones ... workin for the rich white folks and better off washin their dirty drawers than marryin me.

LULA GREEN

Respect the church!

(*Slaps him*.)

NELSON GREEN

(*Sings*.)

Come here, black woman

(*etc˙*)

...

JULIA AUGUSTINE

Oh, Nelson, respect your mother!

NELSON GREEN

Respect your damn self, Julia Augustine!

(*Continues singing*.)

LULA GREEN

How we gonna find a new faith?

NELSON GREEN

(*Softly*.)

By tellin' the truth, Mamma. Merrilee ain't no liar. I got nothin' to offer, just like October.

MATTIE

You keep my husband's name outta your mouth.

NELSON GREEN

(*Sings*.)

Come here, black woman ...

FANNY AND CONGREGATION

(*Sing*.)

Ain't gon let nobody turn me round, turn me round, turn me round
Ain't eon let nobody turn me round ...

HERMAN

(*Staggers out to porch*.)

Julia, I'm going now, I'm sorry ... I don't feel well ... I don't know ...

(*Slides forward and falls*.)

JULIA AUGUSTINE

Mr˙ Nelson ... won'tcha please help me ...

FANNY JOHNSON

Get him out of my yard.

(NELSON *and* JULIA *help* HERMAN *in to bed. Others freeze in yard*.)

END OF ACT ONE

Act 2

Act 2, Scene 1

ACT TWO

SCENE 1

TIME: *Sunday morning*.

SCENE: *The same as Act One except the yard and houses are neater. The clothes line is down. Off in the distance someone is humming a snatch of a hymn. Church bells are ringing*. HERMAN *is in a heavy, restless sleep. The bed covers indicate he has spent a troubled night. On the table Downstage Right are medicine bottles, cups and spoons*, JULIA *is standing beside the bed, swinging a steam kettle; she stops and puts it on a trivet on top of her hope chest*.

FANNY JOHNSON

(*Seeing her*.)

Keep usin' the steam-kettle.

(HERMAN *groans lightly*.)

MATTIE

(*Picks up scissors*.)

Put the scissors under the bed, open. It'll cut the pain.

FANNY JOHNSON

(*Takes scissors from* MATTIE.)

That's for childbirth.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

He's had too much paregoric. Sleepin' his life away. I want a doctor.

FANNY JOHNSON

Over my dead body. It's against the damn law for him to be layin' up in a black woman's bed.

MATTIE

A doctor will call the police.

FANNY JOHNSON

They'll say I run a bad house.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

I'll tell 'em the truth.

MATTIE

We don't tell things to police.

FANNY JOHNSON

When Lula gets back with his sister, his damn sister will take charge.

MATTIE

That's his family.

FANNY JOHNSON

Family is family.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

I'll hire a hack and take him to a doctor.

FANNY JOHNSON

He might die on you. That's police. That's the work-house.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

I'll say I found him on the street!

FANNY JOHNSON

Walk into the jaws of the law--they'll chew you up.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

Suppose his sister won't come?

FANNY JOHNSON

She'll be here,

(FANNY *picks up a tea-cup and turns it upside down on the saucer and twirls it*.)

I see a ship, a ship sailin' on the water.

MATTIE

Water clear or muddy?

FANNY JOHNSON

Crystal clear.

MATTIE

(*Realizing she's late*.)

Oh, I gotta get Princess so her folks can open their ice cream parlor. Take care-a Teeta.

FANNY JOHNSON

I see you on your way to Miami, Florida, goin' on a trip.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

(*Sitting on window seat*.)

I know you want me to move. I will, Fanny.

FANNY JOHNSON

Julia, it's hard to live under these mean white-folks ... but I've done it. I'm the first and only colored they let buy land 'round here.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

They all like you, Fanny. Only one of 'em cares for me ... just one.

FANNY JOHNSON

Yes, I'm thought highly of. When I pass by they can say ... "There she go, Fanny Johnson, representin' her race in-a approved manner" ... 'cause they don't have to worry 'bout my next move. I can't afford to mess that up on

account-a you or any-a the rest-a these hard-luck, better-off-dead, triflin' niggers.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

(*Crossing up Right*.)

I'll move. But I'm gonna call a doctor.

FANNY JOHNSON

Do it, we'll have a yellow quarantine sign on the front door ... "INFLUENZA." Doctor'll fill out papers for the law ... address ... race ...

JULIA AUGUSTINE

I ... I guess I'll wait until his sister gets here.

FANNY JOHNSON

NO, you call a doctor, Nelson won't march in the parade tomorrow or go back to the army, Mattie'll be outta work, Lula can't deliver flowers ...

JULIA AUGUSTINE

I'm sorry, so very sorry. I'm the one breakin' laws, doin' wrong.

FANNY JOHNSON

I'm not judgin' you. High or low, nobody's against this if it's kept quiet. But when you pickin' white ... pick a wealthy white. It makes things easier.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

No, Herman's not rich and I've never tried to beat him out of anything.

FANNY JOHNSON

(*Crossing to* JULIA.)

Well, he just ought-a be and you just should-a. A colored woman needs money more than anybody else in this world.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

You sell yours.

FANNY JOHNSON

All I don't sell I'm going to keep.

HERMAN

Julia?

FANNY JOHNSON

(*Very genial*.)

Well, well, sir, how you feelin', Mr˙ Herman? This is Aunt Fanny ... Miss Julia's landlady. You lookin' better, Mr˙ Herman. We've been praying for you.

(FANNY *exits to* TEETA' *S house*.)

JULIA AUGUSTINE

Miss Lula--went to get your sister.

HERMAN

Why?

JULIA AUGUSTINE

Fanny made me. We couldn't wake you up.

(*He tries to sit up in bed to prepare for leaving. She tries to help him. He falls back on the pillow*.)

HERMAN

Get my wallet ... see how much money is there. What's that smell?

(*She takes the wallet from his coat pocket. She completes counting the money*.)

JULIA AUGUSTINE

Eucalyptus oil, to help you breathe; I smell it, you smell it and Annabelle will have to smell it too! Seventeen dollars.

HERMAN

A boat ticket to New York is fourteen dollars-Ohhhh, Kerist! Pain ... pain ... Count to ten ... one, two ...

(JULIA *gives paregoric water to him. He drinks. She puts down glass and picks up damp cloth from bowl on tray and wipes his brow*.)

My mother is made out of too many ... little things ... the price of carrots, how much fat is on the meat ... little things make people small. Make ignorance-y'know?

JULIA AUGUSTINE

Don't fret about your people, I promise I won't be surprised at anything and I won't have unpleasant words no matter what.

HERMAN

(*The pain eases. He is exhausted*.)

Ahhh, there ... All men are born which is--utterly untrue.

(NELSON *steps out of the house. He is brushing his army jacket*. HERMAN *moans slightly*. JULIA *gets her dress-making scissors and opens them, places the scissors under the bed*.)

FANNY JOHNSON

(*To* NELSON *as she nods towards* JULIA'S *house*.)

I like men of African descent, myself.

NELSON GREEN

Pitiful people. They pitiful.

FANNY JOHNSON

They common. Only reason I'm sleepin' in a double bed by myself is 'cause I got to bear the standard for the race. I oughta run her outta here for the sake-a the race too.

NELSON GREEN

It's your property. Run us all off it, Fanny.

FANNY JOHNSON

Plenty-a these hungry, jobless, bad-luck colored men, just-a itchin' to move in on my gravy-train. I don't want 'em.

NELSON GREEN

(*With good nature*.)

Right, Fanny! We empty-handed, got nothin to offer.

FANNY JOHNSON

But I'm damn tired-a ramblin' round in five rooms by myself. House full-a new furniture, the icebox forever full-a goodies. I'm a fine cook and I know how to pleasure a man ... he wouldn't have to step outside for a thing ... food, fun and finance ... all under one roof. Nelson, how'd you like to be my business advisor? Fix you up a little office in my front parlor. You wouldn't have to work for white folks ... and Lula wouldn't have to pay rent. The war won't last forever ... then what you gonna do? They got nothin' for you but haulin' wood and cleanin' toilets. Let's you and me pitch in together.

NELSON GREEN

I know you just teasin', but I wouldn't do a-tall. Somebody like me ain't good enough for you no-way, but you a fine-lookin' woman, though. After the war I might hit out for Chicago or Detroit ... a rollin' stone gathers no moss.

FANNY JOHNSON

Roll on. Just tryin' to help the race.

(LULA *enters by front entry, followed by* ANNABELLE, *a woman in her thirties. She assumes a slightly mincing air of fashionable delicacy. She might be graceful if she were not ashamed of her size. She is nervous and fearful in this strange atmosphere. The others fall silent as they see her.* ANNABELLE *wonders if* PRINCESS *is her brother's child? Or could it be* TEETA, *or both?*)

ANNABELLE

Hello there ... er ... children.

PRINCESS

(*Can't resist mocking her*.)

Hello there, er ...

children

(*Giggles*.)

ANNABELLE

(*To* TEETA.)

Is she your sister?

(ANNABELLE *looks at* NELSON *and draws her shawl a little closer*.)

TEETA

You have to ask my mama.

NELSON GREEN

(*Annoyed with* ANNABELLE' *S discomfort*.)

Mom, where's the flat-iron?

(*Turns and enters his house*. LULA *follows*. MATTIE *and* CHILDREN *exit*.)

FANNY JOHNSON

I'm the landlady. Mr˙ Herman had every care and kindness' cept a doctor, Miss Juliaaaa! That's the family's concern.

(FANNY *opens door, then exits*.)

ANNABELLE

Sister's here. It's Annabelle.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

(*Shows her to a chair*.)

One minute he's with you, the next he's gone. Paregoric makes you sleep.

ANNABELLE

(*Dabs at her eyes with a handkerchief*)

Cryin' doesn't make sense a-tall. I'm a volunteer worker at the Naval hospital ... I've nursed my mother ...

(*Chokes with tears*.)

JULIA AUGUSTINE

(*Pours a glass of water for her*.)

Well, this is more than sickness. It's not knowin' 'bout other things.

ANNABELLE

We've known for years. He is away all the time and when old Uncle Greenlee ... He's a colored gentleman who works in our neighborhood ... and he said ... he told ... er, well, people do talk.

(ANNABELLE *spills water*, JULIA *attempts to wipe the water from her dress*.)

Don't do that ... It's all right.

HERMAN

Julia?

ANNABELLE

Sister's here. Mama and Uncle Greenlee have a hack down the street. Gets a little darker we'll take you home, call a physician ...

JULIA AUGUSTINE

Can't you do it right away?

ANNABELLE

'Course you could put him out. Please let us wait 'til dark.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

Get a doctor.

ANNABELLE

Our plans are made, thank you.

HERMAN

Annabelle, this is Julia.

ANNABELLE

Hush.

HERMAN

This is my sister.

ANNABELLE

Now be still.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

I'll call Greenlee to help him dress.

ANNABELLE

No. Dress first. The colored folk in *our* neighborhood have great respect for us.

HERMAN

Because I give away cinnamon buns, for Kerist sake.

ANNABELLE

(*To* JULIA.)

I promised my mother I'd try and talk to you. Now--you look like one-a the nice coloreds ...

HERMAN

Remember you are a concert pianist, that is a very dignified calling.

ANNABELLE

Put these on. We'll turn our backs.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

He can't.

ANNABELLE

(*Holds the covers in a way to keep his midsection under wraps*.)

Hold up.

(*They manage to get the trousers up as high as his waist but they are twisted and crooked*.)

Up we go! There ...

(*They are breathless from the effort of lifting him*.)

Now fasten your clothing.

(JULIA *fastens his clothes*.)

I declare, even a dead man oughta have enough pride to fasten himself.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

You're a volunteer at the Naval hospital?

HERMAN

(*As another pain hits him*.)

Julia, my little brown girl ... Keep singing ...

JULIA AUGUSTINE

We are climbin' Jacob's ladder, We are climbin' Jacob's ladder, We are climbin' Jacob's ladder, Soldiers of the Cross ...

HERMAN

The palms of your hands ...

JULIA AUGUSTINE

(*Singing*.)

Every round goes higher and higher ...

HERMAN

... the soles of your feet are pink and brown.

ANNABELLE

Dammit, hush. Hush this noise. Sick or not sick, hush! It's ugliness.

(*To* JULIA.)

Let me take care of him, please, leave us alone.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

I'll get Greenlee.

ANNABELLE

No! You hear me? No.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

I'll be outside.

ANNABELLE

(*Sitting on bed*.)

If she hadn't-a gone I'd-a screamed.

(JULIA *stands on the porch*. ANNABELLE *cries*.)

I thought so highly of you ... and here you are in somethin' that's been festerin' for years.

(*In disbelief*.)

One of the finest women in the world is pinin' her heart out for you, a woman who's pure gold. Everything Celestine does for Mama she's really doin' for you ... to get next to you ... But even a Saint wants some reward.

HERMAN

I don't want Saint Celestine.

ANNABELLE

(*Standing*.)

Get up!

(*Tries to move* HERMAN.)

At the Naval hospital I've seen influenza cases tied down to keep 'em from walkin'. What're we doin' here? How do you meet a black woman?

HERMAN

She came in the bakery on a rainy Saturday evening.

ANNABELLE

(*Giving in to curiosity*.)

Yes?

MATTIE

(*Offstage. Scolding* TEETA *and* PRINCESS.)

Sit down and drink that lemonade. Don't bother me!

HERMAN

"I smell rye bread baking." Those were the first words ... Every day ... Each time the bell sounds over the shop door I'm hopin' it's the brown girl ... pretty shirt-waist and navy blue skirt. One day I took her hand ... "little lady, don't be afraid of me" ... She wasn't.... I've never been lonesome since.

ANNABELLE

(*Holding out his shirt*.)

Here, your arm goes in the sleeve.

(*They're managing to get the shirt on*.)

HERMAN

(*Beginning to ramble*.)

Julia? Your body is velvet ... the sweet blackberry kisses ... you are the night-time, the warm, Carolina night-

time in my arms ...

ANNABELLE

(*Bitterly*.)

Most excitement I've ever had was takin' piano lessons.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

(*Calls from porch*.)

Ready?

ANNABELLE

No. Rushin' us out. A little longer, please.

(*Takes a comb from her purse and nervously combs his hair*.)

You nor Mama put yourselves out to understand my Walter when I had him home to dinner. Yes, he's a common sailor ... I wish he was an officer. I never liked a sailor's uniform, tight pants and middy blouses ... but they are in the service of their country ... He's taller than I am. You didn't even stay home that one Sunday like you promised. Must-a been chasin' after some-a them blackberry kisses you love so well. Mama made a jackass outta Walter. You know how she can do. He left lookin' like a whipped dog. Small Wonder he won't live down here. I'm crazy-wild 'bout Walter even if he is a sailor. Marry Celestine, She'll take care-a Mama and I can go right on up to the Brooklyn Navy Yard. I been prayin' so hard ... You marry Celestine and set me free. And Gawd knows I Don't want another concert.

HERMAN

(*Sighs*.)

Pain, keep singing.

ANNABELLE

Dum-dum-blue Danube.

(*He falls back on the pillow. She bathes his head with a damp cloth*.)

JULIA AUGUSTINE

(*As* NELSON *enters the yard*.)

Tell your mother I'm grateful for her kindness. I appreciate ...

NELSON GREEN

Don't have so much to say to me.

(*Quietly, in a straightforward manner*.)

They set us on fire 'bout their women. String us up, pour on kerosene and light a match. Wouldn't I make a bright flame in my new Uniform?

JULIA AUGUSTINE

Don't be thinkin' that way.

NELSON GREEN

I'm thinkin' 'bout black boys hangin' from trees in Little Mountain, Elloree, Winnsboro.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

Herman never killed anybody. I couldn't care 'bout that kind-a man.

NELSON GREEN

(*Stepping, turning to her*.)

How can you account for carin' 'bout him a-tall?

JULIA AUGUSTINE

In that place where I worked, he was the only one Who cared ... who really cared. So gentle, such a gentle man ... "Yes, Ma'am," ... "No, Ma'am," "Thank you, Ma'am ..." In the best years of my youth, my Aunt Cora sent me out to work on a sleep-in job. His shop was near that place where I worked. ... Most folks don't have to *account* for why they love.

NELSON GREEN

You ain't most folks. You're down on the bottom with us, under his foot. A black man got nothin' to offer you ...

JULIA AUGUSTINE

I wasn't lookin' for anybody to do for me.

NELSON GREEN

.... and *he's* got nothin' to offer. The one layin' on your mattress, not even if he's kind as you say. He got nothin' for you ... but some meat and gravy or a new petticoat ... or maybe he can give you meriny-lookin' little bastard chirrun for us to take in and raise up. We're the ones who feed and raise 'em when it's like this ... They don't want 'em. They only too glad to let us have their kin-folk. As it is, we supportin' half-a the slave-master's offspring right now.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

Go fight those who fight you. He never threw a pail-a water on you. Why didn't you right them that did? Takin' it out on me 'n Herman 'cause you scared Of 'em ...

NELSON GREEN

Scared? What scared! If I gotta die I'm carryin' one 'long with me.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

No you not. You gon' keep on fightin' me.

NELSON GREEN

.... Scared-a what? I look down on 'em, I spit on 'em.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

No, you don't. They throw dirty water on your uniform ... and you spit on me!

NELSON GREEN

Scared, what seared!

JULIA AUGUSTINE

You fightin' me, me, me, not them ... never them.

NELSON GREEN

Yeah, I was scared and I'm tougher, stronger, a better man than any of 'em ... but they won't letcha fight one or four or ten. I was scared to fight a hundred or a thousand. A losin' fight.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

I'd-a been afraid too.

NELSON GREEN

And you scared right now, you let the woman run you out your house.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

I didn't want to make trouble.

NELSON GREEN

But that's what a fight is ... trouble.

LULA GREEN

(*In her doorway*.)

Your mouth will kill you.

(*To* JULIA.)

Don't tell Mr˙ Herman anything he said ... or I'll hurt you.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

Oh, Miss Lula.

LULA GREEN

Anyway, he didn't say nothin'.

(HERMAN'S MOTHER *enters the yard. She is a "poor white" about fifty-seven years old. She has risen above her poor farm background and tries to assume the airs of "quality." Her clothes are well-kept-shabby. She wears white shoes, a shirtwaist and skirt, drop earrings, a cameo brooch, a faded blue straw hat with a limp bit of veiling. She carries a heavy-black, oil-cloth bag. All in the yard give a step backward as she enters. She assumes an air of calm well-being. Almost as though visiting friends, but anxiety shows around the edges and underneath*. JULIA *approaches and* HERMAN'S MOTHER *abruptly turns to* MATTIE.)

HERMAN'S MOTHER

How do.

(MATTIE, TEETA *and* PRINCESS *look at* HERMAN'S MOTHER. HERMAN'S MOTHER *is also curious about them*.)

MATTIE

(*In answer to a penetrating stare from the old woman*.)

She's mine. I take care-a her.

(*Speaking her defiance by ordering the children*.)

Stay inside 'fore y'all catch the flu!

HERMAN'S MOTHER

(*To* LULA.)

You were very kind to bring word ... er ...

LULA GREEN

LULA, Ma'am.

HERMAN'S MOTHER

The woman who nursed my second cousin's children ... she had a name like that ... Lulu we called her.

LULA GREEN

My son, Nelson.

HERMAN'S MOTHER

Can see that.

(MATTIE *and the children exit*. FANNY *hurries in from the front entry. Is most eager to establish herself on the good side of* HERMAN'S MOTHER. *With a slight bow. She is carrying the silver tea service*.)

FANNY JOHNSON

Beg pardon, if I may be so bold, I'm Fanny, the owner of all this property.

HERMAN'S MOTHER

(*Definitely approving of* FANNY.)

I'm ... er ... Miss Aunabelle's mother.

FANNY JOHNSON

My humble pleasure ... er ... Miss er ...

HERMAN'S MOTHER

(*After a brief, thoughtful pause*.)

Miss Thelma.

(*They move aside but* FANNY *makes sure others hear*.)

FANNY JOHNSON

Miss Thelma, this is not Squeeze-gut Alley. We're just poor, humble, colored people ... and everybody knows how to keep their mouth shut.

HERMAN'S MOTHER

I thank you.

FANNY JOHNSON

She wanted to get a doctor. I put my foot down.

HERMAN'S MOTHER

You did right.

(*Shaking her head, confiding her troubles*.)

Ohhhh, you don't know.

FANNY JOHNSON

(*With deep understanding*.)

Ohhhh, yes, I do. She moved in on me yesterday.

HERMAN'S MOTHER

Friend Fanny, help me to get through this.

FANNY JOHNSON

I will. Now this is Julia, she's the one ...

(HERMAN'S MOTHER *starts toward the house without looking at* JULIA. FANNY *decides to let the matter drop*.)

HERMAN'S MOTHER

(*To* LULA.)

Tell Uncle Greenlee not to worry. He's holdin' the horse and buggy.

NELSON GREEN

(*Bars* LULA' *S way*.)

Mama. I'll do it.

(LULA *exits into her house*. FANNY *leads her to the chair near* HERMAN' *S bed*.)

ANNABELLE

Mama, if we don't call a doctor Herman's gonna die.

HERMAN'S MOTHER

Everybody's gon' die. Just a matter of when, where and how. A pretty silver service.

FANNY JOHNSON

English china. Belgian linen. Have a cup-a tea?

HERMAN'S MOTHER

(*As a studied pronouncement*.)

My son comes to deliver baked goods and the influenza strikes him down, Sickness, it's the war.

FANNY JOHNSON

(*Admiring her cleverness*.)

Yes, Ma'am, I'm a witness. I saw him with the packages.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

Now please call the doctor.

ANNABELLE

Yes, please, Mama. No way for him to move 'less we pick him up bodily.

HERMAN'S MOTHER

Then we'll pick him up.

HERMAN

About Walter ... your Walter ... I'm sorry ...

(JULIA *tries to give* HERMAN *some water*.)

HERMAN'S MOTHER

Annabelle, help your brother.

(ANNABELLE *gingerly takes glass from* JULIA.)

Get that boy to help us. I'll give him a dollar. Now gather his things.

ANNABELLE

What things?

HERMAN'S MOTHER

His possessions, anything he owns, whatever is his. What you been doin' in here all this time?

(FANNY *notices* JULIA *is about to speak, so she hurries her through the motions of going through dresser drawers and throwing articles into a pillow case*.)

FANNY JOHNSON

Come on, sugar, make haste.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

Don't go through my belongings.

(*Tears through the drawers, flinging things around as she tries to find his articles*. FANNY *neatly piles them together*.)

FANNY JOHNSON

(*Taking inventory*.)

Three shirts ... one is kinda soiled.

HERMAN'S MOTHER

That's all right, I'll burn 'em.

FANNY JOHNSON

Some new undershirts.

HERMAN'S MOTHER

I'll burn them too.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

(*To* FANNY.)

Put 'em down. I bought 'em and they're not for burnin'.

HERMAN'S MOTHER

(*Struggling to hold her anger in check*.)

Fanny, go get that boy. I'll give him fifty cents.

FANNY JOHNSON

You said a dollar.

HERMAN'S MOTHER

All right, dollar it is.

(FANNY *exits toward the front entry. In tense, hushed, excited tones, they argue back and forth*.)

Now where's the bill-fold ... there's papers ... identity ...

(*Looks in* HERMAN' *S coat pockets*.)

ANNABELLE

Don't make such-a to-do.

HERMAN'S MOTHER

You got any money of your own? Yes, I wanta know where's his money.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

I'm gettin' it.

HERMAN'S MOTHER

In her pocketbook. This is why the bakery can't make it.

HERMAN

I gave her the Gawd-damned money!

JULIA AUGUSTINE

And I know what Herman wants me to do ...

HERMAN'S MOTHER

(*With a wry smile*.)

I'm sure you know what he wants.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

I'm not gonna match words with you. Furthermore, I'm too much of a lady.

HERMAN'S MOTHER

A lady oughta learn how to keep her dress down.

ANNABELLE

Mama, you makin' a spectacle outta yourself.

HERMAN'S MOTHER

You a big simpleton. Men have nasty natures, they can't help it. A man would go with a snake if he only knew how. They cleaned out your wallet.

HERMAN

(*Shivering with a chill*.)

I gave her the damn money.

(JULIA *takes it from her purse*.)

HERMAN'S MOTHER

Where's your pocket-watch or did you give that too? Annabelle, get another lock put on that bakery door.

HERMAN

I gave her the money to go--to go to New York.

(JULIA *drops the money in* HERMAN'S MOTHER' *S lap. She is silent for a moment*.)

HERMAN'S MOTHER

All right. Take it and go. It's never too late to undo a mistake. I'll add more to it.

(*She puts the money on the dresser*.)

JULIA AUGUSTINE

I'm not goin' anywhere.

HERMAN'S MOTHER

Look here, girl, you leave him 'lone.

ANNABELLE

Oh, Mama, all he has to do is stay away.

HERMAN'S MOTHER

But he can't do it. Been years and he can't do it.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

I got him hoo-dooed, I sprinkle red pepper on his shirt-tail.

HERMAN'S MOTHER

I believe you.

HERMAN

I have a black woman ... and I'm gon' marry her. I'm gon' marry her ... got that? Pride needs a paper, for ... for the sake of herself ... that's dignity--tell me, what is dignity--Higher than the dirt it is ... dignity is ...

ANNABELLE

Let's take him to the doctor, Mama.

HERMAN'S MOTHER

When it's dark.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

Please!

HERMAN'S MOTHER

Nightfall.

(JULIA *steps out on the porch but hears every word said in the room*.)

I had such high hopes for him.

(*As if* HERMAN *is dead*.)

All my high hopes. When he wasn't but five years old I had to whip him so he'd study his John C˙ Calhoun speech. Oh, Calhoun knew 'bout niggers. He said, " *MEN* are not born ... equal, or any other kinda way ... MEN are *made*" ... Yes, indeed, for recitin' that John C˙ Calhoun speech ... Herman won first mention and a twenty dollar gold piece ... at the Knights of The Gold Carnation picnic.

ANNABELLE

Papa changed his mind about the Klan. I'm glad.

HERMAN'S MOTHER

Yes, he was always changin' his mind about somethin'. But I was proud-a my men-folk that day. He spoke that speech ... The officers shook my hand. They honored me ... "That boy a-yours gonna be somebody." A poor baker-son layin' up with a nigger woman, a over-grown daughter in heat over a common sailor. I must be payin' for somethin' I did. Yesiree, do a wrong, God'll whip you.

ANNABELLE

I wish it was dark.

HERMAN'S MOTHER

I put up with a man breathin' stale whiskey in my face every night ... pullin' and pawin' at me ... always tired, inside and out ...

(*Deepest confidence she has ever shared*.)

Gave birth to seven ... five-a them babies couldn't draw breath.

ANNABELLE

(*Suddenly wanting to know more about her*.)

Did you love Papa, Mama? Did you ever love him? ...

HERMAN'S MOTHER

Don't ask me 'bout love ... I don't know nothin' about it. Never mind love. This is my harvest ...

HERMAN

Go home. I'm better.

(HERMAN'S MOTHER'S *strategy is to enlighten* HERMAN *and also wear him down. Out on the porch*, JULIA *can hear what is being said in the house*.)

HERMAN'S MOTHER

There's something wrong 'bout mismatched things, be they shoes, socks, or people.

HERMAN

Go away, don't look at us.

HERMAN'S MOTHER

People don't like it. They're not gonna letcha do it in peace.

HERMAN

We'll go North.

HERMAN'S MOTHER

not a thing will change except her last name.

HERMAN

She's not like others ... she's not like that ...

HERMAN'S MOTHER

All right, sell out to Schumann. I want my cash-money ... You got no feelin' for me, I got none for you ...

HERMAN

I feel ... I feel what I feel ... I don't know what I feel ...

HERMAN'S MOTHER

Don't need to feel. Live by the law. Follow the law--law, law of the land. Obey the law!

ANNABELLE

We're not obeyin' the law. He should be quarantined right here. The city's tryin' to stop an epidemic.

HERMAN'S MOTHER

Let the city drop dead and you 'long with it. *Rather* be dead than disgraced. Your papa gimme the house and little money ... I want my money back.

(*She tries to drag* HERMAN *up in the bed*.)

I ain't payin' for this.

(*Shoves* ANNABELLE *aside*.)

Let Schumann take over. A man who knows what he's doin'. Go with her ... Take the last step against your own! Kill us all. Jesus, Gawd, save us or take us--

HERMAN

(*Screams*.)

No! No! No! No!

HERMAN'S MOTHER

Thank Gawd, the truth is the light. Oh, Blessed Savior ...

(HERMAN *screams out, starting low and ever going higher. She tries to cover his mouth*. ANNABELLE *pulls her hand away*.)

Thank you, Gawd, let the fire go out ... this awful fire.

(LULA *and* NELSON *enter the yard*.)

ANNABELLE

You chokin' him. Mama ...

JULIA AUGUSTINE

(*From the porch*.)

It's dark! It's dark. Now it's very dark.

HERMAN

One ticket on the Clyde Line ... Julia ... where are you? Keep singing ... count ... one, two ... three. Over there, over there ... send the word, send the word ...

HERMAN'S MOTHER

Soon be home, son.

*(*HERMAN *breaks away from the men, staggers to* MATTIE' *S porch and holds on*. MATTIE *smothers a scream and gets the children out of the way*. FANNY *enters*.)

HERMAN

Shut the door ... don't go out ... the enemy ... the enemy ...

(*Recites the Calhoun speech*.)

Men are not born, infants are born! They grow to all the freedom of which the condition in which they were born permits. It is a great and dangerous error to suppose that all people are equally entitled to liberty.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

Go home-Please be still.

HERMAN

It is a reward to be earned, a reward reserved for the intelligent, the patriotic, the virtuous and deserving; and not a boon to be bestowed on a people too ignorant, degraded and vicious ...

JULIA AUGUSTINE

You be still now, shut up.

HERMAN

.... to be capable either of appreciating or of enjoying it.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

(*Covers her ears*.)

Take him ...

HERMAN

A black woman ... not like the others ...

JULIA AUGUSTINE

.... outta my sight ...

HERMAN

Julia, the ship is sinking ...

(HERMAN'S MOTHER *and* NELSON *help* HERMAN *up and out*.)

ANNABELLE

(*To* JULIA *on the porch*.)

I'm sorry ... so sorry it had to be this way. I can't leave with you thinkin' I uphold Herman, and blame you.

HERMAN'S MOTHER

(*Returning*.)

You the biggest fool.

ANNABELLE

I say a man is responsible for his own behavior.

HERMAN'S MOTHER

And you, you oughta be locked up ... workhouse ... jail! Who you think you are!?

JULIA AUGUSTINE

I'm your damn daughter-in-law, you old bitch! The Battleship Bitch! The bitch who destroys with her filthy mouth. They could win the war with your killin' mouth. The son-killer, man-killer bitch ... She's killin' him 'cause he loved me more than anybody in the world.

(FANNY *returns*.)

HERMAN'S MOTHER

Better off ... He's better off dead in his coffin than live with the likes-a you ... black thing!

(*She is almost backing into* JULIA' *S house*.)

JULIA AUGUSTINE

The black thing who bought a hot water bottle to put on your sick, white self when rheumatism threw you flat on your back ... who bought flannel gowns to warm your pale, mean body. He never ran up and down King Street shoppin' for you ... I bought what he took home to you ...

HERMAN'S MOTHER

Lies ... tear outcha lyin' tongue.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

... the lace curtains in your parlor ... the shirtwaist you wearin'--I made them.

FANNY JOHNSON

Go *on* ... I got her.

(*Holds* JULIA.)

HERMAN'S MOTHER

Leave 'er go! The undertaker will have-ta unlock my hands off her black throat!

FANNY JOHNSON

Go on, Miss Thelma.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

Miss Thelma my ass! Her first name is Frieda. The Germans are here ... in purple paint!

HERMAN'S MOTHER

Black, sassy nigger!

JULIA AUGUSTINE

Kraut, knuckle-eater, red-neck ...

HERMAN'S MOTHER

Nigger whore ... he used you for a garbage pail ...

JULIA AUGUSTINE

White trash! Sharecropper! Let him die ... let 'em all die ... Kill him with your murderin' mouth-sharecropper bitch!

HERMAN'S MOTHER

Dirty black nigger ...

JULIA AUGUSTINE

... If I wasn't black with all-a Carolina 'gainst me I'd be mistress of your house!

(*To* ANNABELLE.)

Annabelle, you'd be married livin' in Brooklyn, New York ...

(*To* HERMAN'S MOTHER.)

... and I'd be waitin' on Frieda ... cookin' your meals ... waterin' that damn red-white and blue garden!

HERMAN'S MOTHER

Dirty black bitch.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

Daughter of a bitch!

ANNABELLE

Leave my mother alone! She's old ... and sick.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

But never sick enough to die ... dirty ever-lasting woman.

HERMAN'S MOTHER

(*Clinging to* ANNABELLE, *she moves toward the front entry*.)

I'm as high over you as Mount Everest over the sea. White reigns supreme ... I'm white, you can't change that.

(*They exit*. FANNY *goes with them*.)

JULIA AUGUSTINE

Out! Out! Out! And take the last ten years-a my life with you and ... when he gets better ... keep him home. Killers, murderers ... Kinsmen! Klansmen! Keep him home.

(*To* MATTIE.)

Name and protection ... he can't gimme either one.

(*To* LULA.)

I'm gon' get down on my knees and scrub where they walked ... what they touched ...

(*To* MATTIE.)

... with brown soap ... hot lye-water ... scaldin' hot ...

(*She dashes into the house and collects an armful of bedding* ...)

Clean! ... Clean the whiteness outta my house ... clean everything ... even the memory ... no more love ... Free ... free to hate-cha for the rest-a my life.

(*Back to the porch with her arms full*.)

When I die I'm gonna keep on hatin' ... I don't want any whiteness in my house. Stay out ... out ...

(*Dumps the things in the yard*.)

... out ... out ... out ... and leave me to my black self!

BLACKOUT

Act 2, Scene 2

SCENE 2

TIME: *Early afternoon the following day*.

PLACE: *The same*.

In JULIA' *S room, some of the hope chest things are spilled out on the floor, bedspread, linens, silver cups. The half-emptied wine decanter is in a prominent spot. A table is set up in the yard. We hear the distant sound of a marching band. The excitement of a special day is in the air*. NELSON' *S army jacket hangs on his porch*. LULA *brings a pitcher of punch to table*. MATTIE *enters with* TEETA *and* PRINCESS *; she is annoyed and upset in contrast to* LULA' *S singing and gala mood. She scolds the children, smacks* TEETA' *S behind*.

MATTIE

They was teasin' the Chinaman down the street 'cause his hair is braided.

(*To* CHILDREN.)

If he ketches you, he'll cook you with onions and gravy.

LULA GREEN

(*Inspecting* NELSON' *S jacket*.)

Sure will.

TEETA

Can we go play?

MATTIE

A mad dog might bite-cha.

PRINCESS

Can we go play?

MATTIE

No, you might step on a nail and get lockjaw.

TEETA

Can we go play?

MATTIE

Oh, go on and play! I wish a gypsy would steal both of 'em!

(JULIA *enters her room*.)

LULA GREEN

What's the matter, Mattie?

MATTIE

Them damn fool people at the Merchant Marine don't wanta give me my 'lotment money.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

(*Steps out on her porch with deliberate, defiant energy. She is wearing her wedding dress ... carrying a wine glass. She is over-demonstrating a show of carefree abandon and joy*.)

I'm so happy! I never been this happy in all my life! I'm happy to be alive, alive and livin for my people.

LULA GREEN

You better stop drinkin so much wine.

(LULA *enters her house*.)

JULIA AUGUSTINE

But if you got no feelin's they can't be hurt!

MATTIE

Hey, Julia, the people at the Merchant Marine say I'm not married to October.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

Getcha license, honey, show your papers. Some of us, thang Gawd, got papers!

MATTIE

I don't have none.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

Why? Was October married before?

MATTIE

No, but I was. A good for nothin' named Delroy ... I hate to call his name. Was years 'fore I met October. Delroy used to beat the hell outta me ... tried to stomp me, grind me into the ground ... callin' me such dirty names ... Got so 'til I was shame to look at myself in a mirror. I was glad when he run off.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

Where'd he go?

MATTIE

I don't know. Man at the office kept sayin' ... "You're not married to October" ... and wavin' me 'way like that.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

Mattie, this state won't allow divorce.

MATTIE

Well, I never got one.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

You shoulda so you could marry October. You have to be married to get his benefits.

MATTIE

We was married. On Edisto Island. I had a white dress and flowers ... everything but papers. We couldn't get papers. Elder Bums knew we was doin' best we could.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

You can't marry without papers.

MATTIE

What if your husband run off? And you got no money? Readin' from the Bible makes people married, not no piece-a paper. We're together eleven years, that oughta-a be legal.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

(*Puts down glass*.)

No, it doesn't go that way.

MATTIE

October's out on the icy water, in the war-time, worryin' 'bout me 'n Teeta. I say he's my husband. Gotta pay Fanny, buy food. Julia, what must I do?

JULIA AUGUSTINE

I don't know.

MATTIE

What's the use-a so much-a education if you don't know what to do?

JULIA AUGUSTINE

You may's well just lived with October. Your marriage meant nothin'.

MATTIE

(*Standing angry*.)

It meant somethin' to me if not to anybody else. It means I'm ice cream, too, strawberry.

(MATTIE heads for her house.)

JULIA AUGUSTINE

Get mad with me if it'll make you feel better.

MATTIE

Julia, could you lend me two dollars?

JULIA AUGUSTINE

Yes, that's somethin' I can do besides drink this wine.

(JULIA *goes into her room, to get the two dollars. Enter* FANNY, TEETA *and* PRINCESS.)

FANNY JOHNSON

Colored men don't know how to do nothin' right. I paid that big black boy cross the street ... thirty cents to paint my sign ...

(*Sign reads* ... GOODBYE COLORED BOYS ... *on one side; the other reads* ... FOR GOD AND CONTRY.)

But he can't spell. I'm gon' call him a dumb darky and get my money back. Come on, children!

(CHILDREN *follow laughing*.)

LULA GREEN

Why call him names!?

FANNY JOHNSON

'Cause it makes him mad, that's why.

(FANNY *exits with* TEETA *and* PRINCESS. JULIA *goes into her room*, THE BELL MAN *enters carrying a display board filled with badges and flags ... buttons, red and blue ribbons attached to the buttons ... slogans* ... THE WAR TO END ALL WARS. *He also carries a string of overseas caps* [*paper*] *and wears one. Blows a war tune on his tin flute*, LULA *exits*.)

BELL MAN

"War to end all wars ..." Flags and badges! Getcha emblems! Hup-two-three ... Flags and badges ... hup-two-three! Hey, Aunty! Come back here! Where you at?

(*Starts to follow* LULA *into her house*. NELSON *steps out on the porch and blocks his way*.)

NELSON GREEN

My mother is in her house. You ain't to come walkin' in. You knock.

BELL MAN

Don't letcha uniform go to your head, Boy, or you'll end your days swingin' from a tree.

LULA GREEN

(*Squeezing past* NELSON *dressed in skirt and open shirt-waist*.)

Please, Mister, he ain't got good sense.

MATTIE

He crazy, Mister.

NELSON GREEN

Fact is, you stay out of here. Don't ever come back here no more.

BELL MAN

(*Backing up in surprise*.)

He got no respect. One them crazies. I ain't never harmed a bareassed soul but, hot damn, I can get madder and badder than you. Let your uniform go to your head.

LULA GREEN

Yessir, he goin' back in the army today.

BELL MAN

Might not get there way he's actin'.

MATTIE

(*As* LULA *takes two one dollar bills from her bosom*.)

He sorry right now, Mister, his head ain' right.

BELL MAN

(*Speaks to* LULA *but keeps an eye on* NELSON.)

Why me? I try to give you a laugh but they say, "Play with a puppy and he'll lick your mouth." Familiarity makes for contempt.

LULA GREEN

(*Taking flags and badges*.)

Yessir. Here's somethin' on my account ... and I'm buyin' flags and badges for the children. Everybody know you a good man and do right.

BELL MAN

(*To* LULA.)

You pay up by Monday.

(*To* NELSON.)

Boy, you done cut off your Mama's credit.

LULA GREEN

I don't blame you, Mister.

(BELL MAN *exits*.)

NELSON GREEN

Mama, your new faith don't seem to do much for you.

LULA GREEN

(*Turning to him*.)

Nelson, go on off to the war 'fore somebody kills you. I ain't goin' to let nobody spoil my day.

(LULA *puts flags and badges on punchbowl table*. JULIA *comes out of her room, with the two dollars for* MATTIE-*hands it to her. Sound of Jenkins Colored Orphan Band is heard* [*Record: Ramblin' by Bunk Johnson*].)

JULIA AUGUSTINE

Listen, Lula ... Listen, Mattie ... it's Jenkin's Colored Orphan Band ... Play! Play, you Orphan boys! Rise up higher than the dirt around you! Play! That's struttin' music, Lula!

LULA GREEN

It sure is!

(LULA *struts, arms akimbo, head held high*. JULIA *joins her; they haughtily strut toward each other, then retreat with mock arrogance ... exchange cold, hostile looks ... A Carolina folk dance passed on from some dimly-remembered African beginning. Dance ends strutting*.)

JULIA AUGUSTINE

(*Concedes defeat in the dance*.)

All right, Lula, strut me down! Strut me right on down!

(*They end dance with breathless laughter and cross to* LULA' *S porch*.)

LULA GREEN

Julia! Fasten me! Pin my hair.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

I'm not goin' to that silly parade, with the colored soldiers marchin' at the end of it.

(LULA *sits on the stool*. JULIA *combs and arranges her hair*.)

LULA GREEN

Come on, we'll march behind the white folks whether they want us or not. Mister Herman's people got a nice house ... lemon trees in the yard, lace curtains at the window.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

And red, white and blue flowers all around.

LULA GREEN

That Uncle Greenlee seems to be well-fixed.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

He works for the livery stable ... cleans up behind horses ... in a uniform.

LULA GREEN

That's nice.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

Weeds their gardens ... clips white people's pet dogs ...

LULA GREEN

Ain't that lovely? I wish Nelson was safe and nicely settled.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

Uncle Greenlee is a well-fed, tale-carryin' son-of-a-bitch ... and that's the only kind-a love they want from us.

LULA GREEN

It's wrong to hate.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

They say it's wrong to love too.

LULA GREEN

We got to show 'em we're good, got to be three times as good, just to make it.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

Why? When they mistreat us who cares? We mistreat each other, who cares? Why we gotta be so good jus' for them?

LULA GREEN

Dern you, Julia Augustine, you hard-headed thing, 'cause they'll kill us if we not.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

They doin' it anyway. Last night I dreamed of the dead slaves--all the murdered black and bloody men silently gathered at the foot-a my bed. Oh, that awful silence. I wish the dead could scream and fight back. What they do to us ... and all they want is to be loved in return. Nelson's not Greenlee. Nelson is a fighter.

LULA GREEN

(*Standing*.)

I know. But I'm tryin' to keep him from findin' it out.

(NELSON, *unseen by* LULA, *listens*.)

JULIA AUGUSTINE

Your hair looks pretty.

LULA GREEN

Thank you. A few years back I got down on my knees in the courthouse to keep him off-a the chain gang. I crawled and cried, "Please white folks, yall's everything. I'se nothin, yall's everything." The court laughed--I meant for 'em to laugh ... then they let Nelson go.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

(*Pitying her*.)

Oh, Miss Lula, a lady's not supposed to crawl and cry.

LULA GREEN

I was savin' his life. Is my skirt fastened? Today might be the last time I ever see Nelson.

(NELSON *goes back in house*.)

Tell him how life's gon' be better when he gets back. Make up what *should* be true. A man can't fight a war on nothin' ... would you send a man off--to die on nothin'?

JULIA AUGUSTINE

That's sin, Miss Lula, leavin' on a lie.

LULA GREEN

That's all right--some truth has no nourishment in it. Let him feel good.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

I'll do my best.

(MATTIE *enters carrying a colorful, expensive parasol. It is far beyond the price range of her outfit*.)

MATTIE

October bought it for my birthday 'cause he know I always wanted a fine-quality parasol.

(FANNY *enters through the back entry*, CHILDREN *with her. The mistake on the sign has been corrected by pasting OU over the error*.)

FANNY JOHNSON

(*Admiring* MATTIE' *S appearance*.)

Just shows how the race can look when we wanta. I called Rusty Bennet a dumb darky and he wouldn't even get mad. Wouldn't gimme my money back either. A black Jew.

(NELSON *enters wearing his Private's uniform with quartermaster insignia. He salutes them*.)

NELSON GREEN

Ladies. Was nice seein' you these few days. If I couldn't help, 'least I didn't do you no harm, so nothin' from nothin' leaves nothin'.

FANNY JOHNSON

(*Holds up her punch cup;* LULA *gives* JULIA *high sign*.)

Get one-a them Germans for me.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

(*Stands on her porch*.)

Soon, Nelson, in a little while ... we'll have whatsoever our hearts desire. You're comin' back in glory ... with honors and shining medals ... And those medals and that uniform is gonna open doors for you ... and for October ... for all, all of the servicemen. Nelson, on account-a you we're gonna be able to go in the park. They're gonna take down the no-colored signs ... and Rusty Bennet's gonna print new ones ... Everybody welcome ... Everybody welcome ...

MATTIE

(*To* TEETA.)

Hear that? We gon' go in the park.

FANNY JOHNSON

Some of us ain't ready for that.

PRINCESS

Me too?

MATTIE

You can go now ... and me too if I got you by the hand.

PRINCESS

(*Feeling left out*.)

Ohhhhh.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

We'll go to the band concerts, the museums ... we'll go in the library and draw out books.

MATTIE

And we'll draw books.

FANNY JOHNSON

Who'll read 'em to you?

MATTIE

My Teeta!

JULIA AUGUSTINE

Your life'll be safe, you and October'll be heroes.

FANNY JOHNSON

(*Very moved*.)

Colored heroes.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

And at last we'll come into our own.

(ALL *cheer and applaud*, JULIA *steps down from porch*.)

NELSON GREEN

Julia, can you look me dead in the eye and say you believe all-a that?

JULIA AUGUSTINE

If you just gotta believe somethin', it may's well be that.

(*Applause*.)

NELSON GREEN

(*Steps up on* JULIA' *S porch to make his speech*.)

Friends, relatives and all other well-wishers. All-a my fine ladies and little ladies--all you good-lookin', tantalizin', pretty-eyed ladies--yeah, with your kind ways and your *mean* ways. I find myself a thorn among six lovely roses. Sweet little Teeta ... the merry little Princess. Mattie, she so pretty 'til October better hurry up and come on back here. Fanny--uh--try in' to help the race ... a race woman. And Julia--my good friend. Mama--the only mama I got, I wanta thank you for savin' my life from time to time. What's hard ain't the goin', it's the comin' back. From the bottoma my heart, I'd truly like to see y'all, each and every one-a you ... able to go in the park and all that. I really would. So, with a full heart and a loaded mind, I bid you, as the French say, Adieu.

LULA GREEN

(*Bowing graciously, she takes* NELSON' *S arm and they exit*.)

Our humble thanks ... my humble pleasure ... gratitude ... thank you ...

(CHILDREN *wave their flags*.)

FANNY JOHNSON

(*To the* CHILDREN.)

Let's mind our manners in front-a the downtown white people. Remember we're bein' judged.

PRINCESS

Me too?

MATTIE

(*Opening umbrella*.)

Yes, you too.

FANNY JOHNSON

(*Leads the way and counts time*.)

Step, step, one, two, step, step.

(MATTIE, FANNY *and the* CHILDREN *exit*. HERMAN *enters Yard by far gate, takes two long steamer tickets from his pocket*, JULIA *senses him, turns. He is carelessly dressed and sweating*.)

HERMAN

I bought our tickets. Boat tickets to New York.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

(*Looks at tickets*.)

Colored tickets. You can't use yours.

(*She lets tickets flutter to the ground*.)

HERMAN

They'll change and give one white ticket. You'll ride one deck, I'll ride the other ...

JULIA AUGUSTINE

John C˙ Calhoun really said a mouthful--men are not born--men are made. Ten years ago--that's when you should-a bought tickets. You chained me to your mother for ten years.

HERMAN

(*Kneeling, picking up tickets*.)

Could I walk out on 'em? ... Ker-ist sake. I'm that kinda man like my father was ... a debt-payer, a plain, workin' man--

JULIA AUGUSTINE

He was a member in good standin' of The Gold Carnation. What kinda robes and hoods did those plain men wear? For downin' me and mine. You won twenty dollars in gold.

HERMAN

I love you ... I love work, to come home in the evenin' ... To enjoy the breeze for Gawd's sake ... But no, I never wanted to go to New York. The hell with Goddamn bread factories ... I'm a stony-broke, half-dead, half-way gentleman ... But I'm what I wanta be. A baker.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

You waited 'til you was half-dead to buy those tickets. I don't want to go either ... Get off the boat, the same faces'll be there at the dock. It's that shop. It's that shop!

HERMAN

It's mine. I did want to keep it.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

Right ... people pick what they want most.

HERMAN

(*Indicating the tickets*.)

I did ... you threw it in my face.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

Get out. Get your things and get out of my life.

(*The remarks become counterpoint. Each rides through the other's speech*. HERMAN *goes in house*.)

Must be fine to *own* somethin' --even if it's four walls and a sack-a flour.

HERMAN

(JULIA *has followed him into the house*.)

My father labored in the street ... liftin' and layin' down cobblestone ... liftin' and layin' down stone 'til there was enough money to open a shop ...

JULIA AUGUSTINE

My people ... relatives, friends and strangers ... they worked and slaved free for nothin' for some-a the biggest name families down here ... Elliots, Lawrences, Ravenals ...

(HERMAN *is wearily gathering his belongings*.)

HERMAN

Great honor, working for the biggest name families. That's who you slaved for. Not me. The big names.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

.... the rich and the poor ... We know you ... all of you ... Who you are ... where you came from ... where you goin' ...

HERMAN

What's my privilege ... Good mornin', good afternoon ... pies are ten cents today ... and you can get 'em from Schumann for eight ...

JULIA AUGUSTINE

"She's different" ... I'm no different ...

HERMAN

I'm white ... did it give me favors and friends?

JULIA AUGUSTINE

.... "Not like the others" ... We raised up all-a these Carolina children ... white and the black ... I'm just like all the rest of the colored women ... like Lula, Mattie ... Yes, like Fanny!

HERMAN

Go here, go there ... Philadelphia ... New York ... Schumann wants me to go North too ...

JULIA AUGUSTINE

We nursed you, fed you, buried your dead ... grinned in your face--cried 'bout your troubles--and laughed 'bout ours.

HERMAN

Schumann ... Alien robber ... waitin' to buy me out ... My father ...

JULIA AUGUSTINE

Pickin' up cobblestones ... left him plenty-a time to wear bed-sheets in that Gold Carnation Society ...

HERMAN

He never hurt anybody.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

He hurts me. There's no room for you to love him and me too ...

(*Sits*.)

It can't be done--

HERMAN

The ignorance ... he didn't know ... the ignorance ... mama ... they don't know.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

But *you* know. My father was somebody. He helped put up Roper Hospital and Webster Rice Mills after the earthquake wiped the face-a this Gawd-forsaken city clean ... A fine brick-mason he was ... paid him One-third-a what they paid the white ones ...

HERMAN

We were poor ... No big name, no quality.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

Poor! My Gramma was a slave wash-woman bustin' suds for free! Can't get poorer than that.

HERMAN

(*Trying to shut out the sound of her voice*.)

Not for me, she didn't!

JULIA AUGUSTINE

We the ones built the pretty white mansions ... for free ... the fishin' boats ... for free ... made your clothes, raised your food ... for free ... and I loved you--for free.

HERMAN

A Gawd-damn lie ... nobody did for me ... you know it ... you know how hard I worked--

JULIA AUGUSTINE

If it's anybody's home down here it's mine ... everything in the city is mine--why should I go any-where ... ground I'm standin' on--it's mine.

HERMAN

(*Sitting on foot of the bed*.)

It's the ignorance ... Lemme be, lemme rest ... Ker-ist sake ... It's the ignorance ...

JULIA AUGUSTINE

After ten years you still won't look. All-a my people that's been killed ... It's your people that killed 'em ... all that's been in bondage--your people put 'em there--all that didn't go to school--your people kept 'em out.

HERMAN

But I didn't do it. Did I do it?

JULIA AUGUSTINE

They killed 'em ... all the dead slaves ... buried under a blanket-a this Carolina earth, even the cotton crop is nourished with hearts' blood ... roots-a that cotton tangled and wrapped 'round my bones.

HERMAN

And you blamin' me for it ...

JULIA AUGUSTINE

Yes! ... For the one thing we never talk about ... White folks killin me and mine. You wouldn't let me speak.

HERMAN

I never stopped you ...

JULIA AUGUSTINE

Every time I open my mouth 'bout what they do ... you say ... "Ker-ist, there it is again ..." Whenever somebody was lynched ... You 'n me would eat a very silent supper. It hurt me not to talk ... what you don't say you swallow down ...

(*Pours wine*.)

HERMAN

I was just glad to close the door 'gainst what's out there. You did all the givin' ... I failed you in every way.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

You nursed me when I was sick ... paid my debts ...

HERMAN

I didn't give my name.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

You couldn't ... was the law ...

HERMAN

I shoulda walked 'til we came to where it'd be all right.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

You never put any other woman before me.

HERMAN

Only Mama, Annabelle, the customers, the law ... the ignorance ... I honored them while you waited and waited--

JULIA AUGUSTINE

You clothed me ... you fed me ... you were kind, loving ...

HERMAN

I never did a damn thing for you. After ten years look at it--I never did a damn thing for you.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

Don't low-rate yourself ... leave me something.

HERMAN

When my mother and sister came ... I was ashamed. What am I doin' bein' ashamed of us?

JULIA AUGUSTINE

When you first came in this yard I almost died-a shame ... so many times you was nothin' to me but white ... times we were angry ... damn white man ... times I was tired ... damn white man ... but most times you were my husband, my friend, my lover ...

HERMAN

Whatever is wrong, Julia ... not the law ... *me*; what I didn't do, with all-a my faults, spite-a all that ... You gotta believe I love you ... 'cause I do ... That's the one thing I know ... I love you ... I love you.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

Ain't too many people in this world that get to be loved ... really loved.

HERMAN

We gon' take that boat trip ... You'll see, you'll never be sorry.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

To hell with sorry. Let's be glad!

HERMAN

Sweetheart, leave the ignorance outside ...

(*Stretches out across the bed*.)

Don't let that doctor in here ... to stand over me shakin' his head.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

(*Pours water in a silver cup*.)

Bet you never drank from a silver cup. Carolina water is sweet water ... Wherever you go you gotta come back for a drink-a this water. Sweet water, like the breeze that blows 'cross the battery.

HERMAN

(*Happily weary*.)

I'm gettin' old, that ain' no joke.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

No, you're not. Herman, my real weddin' cake ... I wanta big one ...

HERMAN

Gonna bake it in a wash-tub ...

JULIA AUGUSTINE

We'll put pieces of it in little boxes for folks to take home and dream on.

HERMAN

... But let's don't give none to your landlady ... Gon' get old and funny-lookin' like Robbie m'boy and ... and ...

JULIA AUGUSTINE

And Mable ...

HERMAN

(*Breathing heavier*.)

Robbie says "Mable, where's my keys" ... Mable-Robbie-Mable--

(*Lights change, shadows grow longer*, MATTIE *enters the yard*.)

MATTIE

Hey, Julia!

(*Sound of carriage wheels in front of the main house*, MATTIE *enters* JULIA' *s house. As she sees* HERMAN.)

They 'round there, they come to get him, Julia.

(JULIA *takes the wedding band and chain from around her neck, gives it to* MATTIE *with tickets*.)

JULIA AUGUSTINE

Surprise. Present.

MATTIE

For me?

JULIA AUGUSTINE

Northern tickets ... and a wedding band.

MATTIE

I can't take that for nothing.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

You and Teeta are my people.

MATTIE

Yes.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

You and Teeta are my family. Be my family.

MATTIE

We your people whether we blood kin or not.

(MATTIE *exits to her own porch*.)

FANNY JOHNSON

(*Offstage*.)

No ... No, Ma'am.

(*Enters with* LULA. LULA *is carrying the wilted bouquet*.)

Julia! They think Mr˙ Herman's come back.

(HERMAN'S MOTHER *enters with* ANNABELLE. *The old lady is weary and subdued*. ANNABELLE *is almost without feeling*. JULIA *is on her porch waiting*.)

JULIA AUGUSTINE

Yes, Fanny, he's here,

(LULA *retires to her doorway*. JULIA *silently stares at them, studying each* WOMAN, *seeing them with new eyes. She is going through that rising process wherein she must reject them as the molders and dictators of her life*.)

Nobody comes in my house.

FANNY JOHNSON

What kind-a way is that?

JULIA AUGUSTINE

Nobody comes in my house.

ANNABELLE

We'll quietly take him home.

JULIA AUGUSTINE

You can't come in.

HERMAN'S MOTHER

(*Low-keyed, polite and humble simplicity*.)

You see my condition. Gawd's punishin' me ... Whippin' me for somethin' I did or didn't do. I can't understand this ... I prayed, but ain't no understandin' Herman's dyin'. He's almost gone. It's right and proper that he should die at home in his own bed. I'm askin' humbly ... or else I'm forced to get help from the police.

ANNABELLE

Give her a chance ... She'll do right ... won'tcha?

(HERMAN *stirs. His breathing becomes harsh and deepens into the sound known as the "death rattle*." MATTIE *leads the* CHILDREN *away*.)

JULIA AUGUSTINE

(*Not unkindly*.)

Do whatever you have to do. Win the war. Represent the race. Call the police.

(*She enters her house, closes the door and bolts it*. HERMAN'S MOTHER *leaves through the front entry*. FANNY *slowly follows her*.)

I'm here, do you hear me?

(*He tries to answer but can't*.)

We're standin' on the deck-a that Clyde Line Boat ... wavin' to the people on the shore ... Your mama, Annabelle, my Aunt Cora ... all of our friends ... the children ... all wavin' ... "Don't stay 'way too long ... Be sure and come back ... We gon' miss you ... Come back, we need you" ... But we're goin' ... The whistle's blowin', flags wavin' ... We're takin' off, ridin' the waves so smooth and easy ... There now ...

(ANNABELLE *moves closer to the house as she listens to* JULIA.)

... the bakery's fine ... all the orders are ready ... out to sea ... on our way ...

(*The weight has lifted, she is radiantly happy. She helps him gasp out each remaining breath. With each gasp he seems to draw a step nearer to a wonderful goal*.)

Yes ... Yes ... Yes ... Yes ... Yes ... Yes ...

CURTAIN